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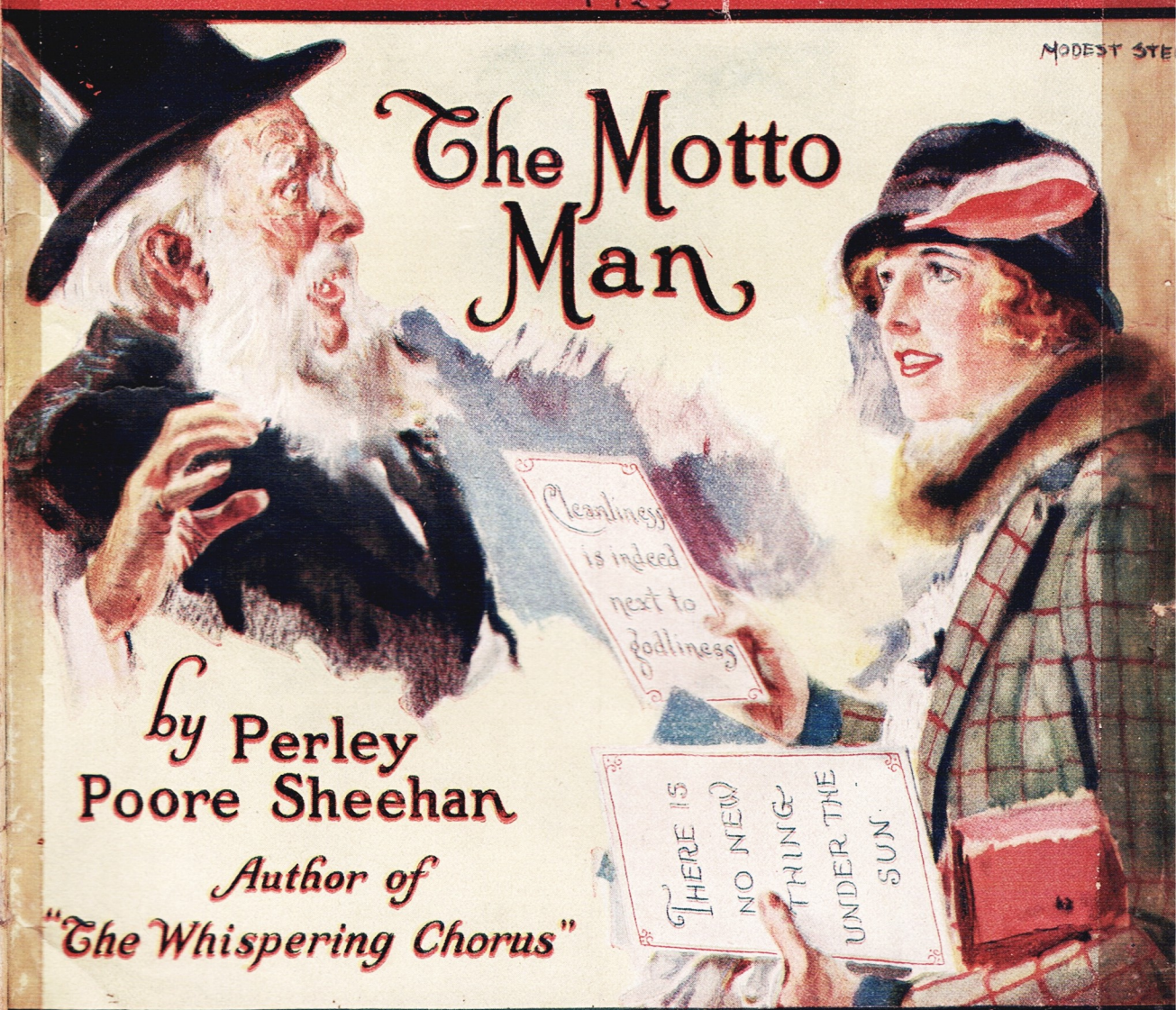
The Motto Man

by Perley Poore Sheehan

Author of "The Whispering Chorus"

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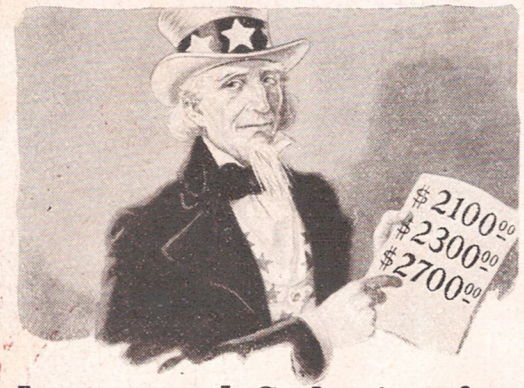

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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY
WEEKLY

VOL. CLXX SATURDAY, JULY 25, 1925 NUMBER 4

The Motto Man

By PERLEY POORE SHEEHAN

Author of "Egrets," "We Are French," etc.

CHAPTER I.

"LET NOT THY LEFT HAND—"

THUS having concluded the deal by the loan of his own impressive fountain pen, which was an unusually fat specimen heavily ornamented with filled gold, the gentleman with the snowy whiskers deftly recovered both pen and contract and caused them to disappear. The contract was for a thousand hymnals—bound in black cloth, red edges, lettered in gold. The minister who had signed the contract was scholarly, mild, and very young. The venerable agent who had put over the deal beamed on him through gold-rimmed spectacles and fondled his snowy drift of beard.

Why should he tell the younger man that there was a misprint on page fourteen, that there was a misplaced title on page sixty-three, and that about a quarter of the book was upside down?—that, in brief, was the last of a rather large output produced during a now historic strike in the printing trades. It would merely disturb his peace of mind.

"As for the check," the minister began—

"Ah, yes!" the venerable agent cooed, as if he had but now thought about such

material things as money. "I suppose that if you were to go with me to Brother Hoxie's bank on my way to the station—Brother Hoxie, was it not?"

"I'm afraid we should not find him."

"Mayhap some other brother—"

"I'm afraid not. You see, this is somewhat in the nature of a holiday here in Millville—the graduation day at our seminary."

"Seminary," droned the venerable agent. He was looking slightly cross-eyed; but he was concealing his emotions as best he might, also playing for time to think. He wanted that check, was secretly consigning Millville and its holiday to the bad place. "Seminary," he repeated; "reminds me of my own theological studies."

"This is different," the minister explained. "This is a school for young ladies—the Millville Female Seminary."

"Well, well!"—and the elderly gentleman began to beam in spite of his financial disappointment. After all, as he himself so often expressed it in speaking to ministers, "money isn't everything. Well, well, well," he rippled. "Female seminary!"

"And Brother Hoxie wanted me to invite you to be present. He, you know, is delivering the principal address. So, if you do us the honor of sitting with us on the platform—"

"Bless you, yes!" said the dear old man, rubbing his hands and getting to his feet. He had made a mental calculation. He'd get the check certified, cash it in New York. If needs be, he could even stop off in Binghampton and get it cashed there—at a moderate discount, by Winnie the Goof. "I never," he said, "allow business to interfere with what seems like a duty. Jes' set me back among the graduates—"

June, and the graduation exercises of the Millville Female Seminary were to be conducted as usual, weather permitting, on the campus of that honorable institution, in the open air. The buildings of the seminary weren't much—of dingy brick and out of date; but the trees were fine—old walnuts and hickories, maple and ash. Under these the uncut grass of the campus had grown long and fine—crushed now under the feet of all Millville, and to a large extent of Millville County in general, thus filling the air with a fragrance like that of the first day of a county fair.

There was, indeed, much of the fair-time about the occasion in other respects. Pretty much everywhere teams were at ease and cars were parked. Many of the teams had been unhitched for the day and were munching fragrant snacks of oats and corn from improvised mangers. Here and there were temporary booths where lemonade and popcorn, coffee and hot-dogs were dispensed.

The hymnal agent surveyed all this with smiling benignancy as he accompanied the young minister toward the center and the cause of all this excitement. There was plenty of time for such observation. The man of cloth had cranked up his own small but trusty car and was now driving toward the seminary with his eminent guest. Plug hat, gold spectacles, impressive beard, a yet more impressive physique—the eminent guest was certainly attracting at least as much attention as he gave.

"Sally," said the ministerial chauffeur, "is at least obedient to the speed laws." He was referring to his car. "But here we are."

The eminent guest smiled a blessing on the crowd as an usher—more truly, an "usherette"—conducted him and his ministerial friend toward what was called the "rostrum." This was a grand stand, the unplaned planks and scantlings of which had been wound about with plain white muslin and colored bunting. The decorative effect of this, and also the sylvan fragrance of the place in general, had been increased by a profusion of leafy garlands and bunches of flowers both wild and tame—old-fashioned roses, sunflowers, syringas, lilacs, cat-tails even.

Skyblue, otherwise the Bishop, *alias* the Reverend Dr. Culbertson, "of London, England," but now—and for the last time, he believed, having got rid of his last job-lot of condemned hymnals—but now, as we were saying, Amos Godie, D.D., LL.D., according to the cards he carried in his wallet, savored all this. He had always

had a weakness for country life. He savored the sylvan perfumes. Besides, his soul was at peace. Brother Hoxie, the banker, had pressed his hand, had promised him the fat check, certified, as soon as the ceremonial of diploma-conferring should be concluded.

It was one of those rare occasions when Brother Hoxie—generally hard-boiled, as Skyblue divined—would have agreed to anything.

"Let yer deposits be, therefore"—it was Brother Hoxie speaking now—"in golden deeds."

Skyblue smiled through his beard and twiddled his thumbs over his benignant stomach. From where he sat, well down on the front of the platform, he could see practically all the graduates. They heightened his complacency, filled his heart with a great mellowness.

"Cornfed," he mused, and was not displeased with the knowledge that quite a few of these young things were looking at him.

And well they might. Grandfatherly, he would have to admit, in his frock coat, gold chain, black spats, with his ebony cane of an ivory top. "And still," he meditated, "quite a man!—quite a man!" He beamed at the girl nearest him and enjoyed her pretty flush.

"— and so," Brother Hoxie now concluded, perspiring freely despite his usual appearance of desiccation, "go out into the gur-ate world and bur-ing the full measure of gul-ory to this, our bul-uvid insty-tooshin of higher ul-earning."

The applause was barely over before the graduates were singing their class song:

"And now when we are called away
In distant climes to roam,
Still will our hearts all faithful be
To our Alma Mater home."

And then the grand distribution of diplomas was on—each young lady coming forward and getting her roll of parchment with a broad white ribbon around it and tied in an impressive bow.

"Cornfed! Cornfed!" Skyblue appreciated, toying with strands of his beard; "plenty of beam; nice and healthy!" And he was comparing the graduates favorably with all the girls he knew, back in New York; "Dottie, the Fly," "Red May," Lizzie Fritz, better known as "Chow Mein"; Bull Tucker's new girl, "the Jersey Lil"—because the cops wouldn't let her come over from Hoboken.

For awhile, in fact, the old gentleman was letting himself go on a sentimental spree. But there was homesickness in it. He had been away from New York now for almost two months. Yes, he loved the country. Folks were easier to work out here—especially the good ones, and these were his graft. But wasn't New York, after all, the real test-tube of success. Was it true, that challenge that Young Rafferty, the phony prize-fighter, had flung at him just prior to this trip, that he, Skyblue, the Bishop, himself was a hick?

The young minister, seated at his side, leaned toward him and whispered, "I don't blame you for being touched, brother! Isn't she wonderful?"

Skyblue used his handkerchief freely and perceived that reference had been made to the young lady who now held the center of the stage.

"Would that she were my daughter," Skyblue came back with fond unction when some applause had subsided. "I didn't ketch her name."

"Our valedictorian," the minister informed in a hasty whisper. "Miss Clarice Beldon."

CHAPTER II.

"BEYOND THE ALPS."

THAT was Clarice speaking now—a clear full voice that somehow matched her clear blue eyes, the transparent health of that shapely frame under her girlish white graduation dress. The subject of her discourse, it evolved, was Ambition.

"Standing with reluctant feet
Where the brook and river meet—"

And as she developed the text that, after all, "beyond the Alps lies Italy," Skyblue's interest in the girl began to lift itself, so to speak, from the purely physical to an

intellectual plane. Wasn't all this that the maiden said exactly in line with what his own thoughts had been awhile ago? Why, indeed, stay out in the sticks when you hear the main stem calling to you? Broadway, what!

"Better," he paraphrased the fair valedictorian's essay, "yet, better be a wop with earrings down there—with a banana pitch—with a hand-organ and a flea-scratcher—"

There were tears in his gentle eyes. To him, the Alps meant the Bronx; and Italy was Little Italy—either one of them, uptown or down. But he got the little girl, all right. Clarice was there—all there. Making it clear she was that she also was going to beat it for Broadway, now that school was out.

It was a community of interest which they were going to discuss together, Skyblue and Clarice, later in the day.

Having missed the only train out of town anyway, Skyblue had accepted, not without modesty and grace, the invitation from Brother Hoxie himself to attend the alumni banquet of the Seminary to be held that evening in Odd Fellows' Hall.

"And now, before the young folks get to their dancin' and their prancin'," Brother Hoxie wittily announced, "let us hear from one more friend." He was the toastmaster of the banquet. He looked meaningly at Skyblue, who began to stroke his beard with his left hand, thus displaying a large diamond ring. Even if there was a flaw in the "rock," as Skyblue himself had pointed out with venomous heat to one Wiener, who had traded it against certain blue chips in a recent game of stud, the jewel now none the less brought a responsive glitter to all eyes that beheld it. "One who I consider it a pur-iluv-ige myself to hail as a friend," Brother Hoxie was concluding, "the Reverund Doctor Amos Godie of New York City."

There was a ripple of applause, which Skyblue hadn't supposed, apparently, had been intended for himself. He came out of his deep reverie with a start. He appeared to be bashful and a little flustered. In fact, he begged Brother Hoxie to excuse him—did this in a chiding whisper which merely increased the applause. He then turned to Mrs. Hoxie, who was seated at his left, and demanded: "What say you, sister? Shall I, really?" To which she had answered without a moment's hesitation: "Why, of course, you dear man!" And Mrs. Hoxie had backed up the declaration with a frantic signal to her sisters up and down the table for fresh applause.

So Skyblue, not without further hesitation, and giving in only when the acclamations were becoming riotous, finally got to his feet. Even so, he stood there for awhile timid and disconcerted. At this there was still more applause—to encourage him; and not until then did he raise the hand with the ring on it as a signal for silence. He lowered his hand only when silence was complete. He now smiled on all those about him—did this with such friendly warmth that there was a fresh flutter of handclapping from some of the girl graduates.

Clarice Beldon, as valedictorian, was just opposite.

"Beloved," Skyblue began; and for no reason at all Clarice was seen to blush.

"Jest now," began the speaker in a voice that quavered, but would soon take on force, "I was thinkin' how I'd love to remain here with you in this blessed little town—here in Millville, beloved; here with your Millville Female Seminary, with your citizens like Brother Hoxie. Oh-h-h, beloved, I've visited Vassar, and—and—I've visited 'em all; but here, in your own female seminary—"

In his pause there was a fresh outbreak of cheering and hand clapping. This came to a climax when the graduation class burst into its song—"And now when we are called away." As the noise gave signs of falling off, Skyblue began to make motions with his chin as if he were talking again.

"But me," he came out when he could be heard again, "like our beloved classmate here across the table from me—what's her name?—Clarice!—Clarice Beldon (some applause from Miss Beldon's friends)—as good as she is beautiful (more applause)—was tellin' us this afternoon. Yes, dear

friends, let us go on lovin' each other—but when duty calls—oh-h-h when duty calls—let us show that we are worthy of Millville, and Vassar, and our female seminaries, and of our mothers, friends. Dry the damp eyes; steady the tremblin' hand. But, oh-h-h my dear friends, even if we do get to be great—and many—yea all of these, as I might say, sweet blossoms of womanhood, as my friend the poet once said—let us never forget that what we are we owe it to our mothers."

Skyblue here elaborately blew his nose. There was a slight pause, and then, at a signal from the toast master, the pent-up emotions of the diners were let loose in the old song which had already been used for previous speakers: "For he's a jolly good fellow."

"I wanted to tell you," Clarice told Skyblue modestly, after the dancing had begun, "what an inspiration it was to hear you."

The good doctor took her hand and patted it. "What's this," he demanded gently, "I hear about your goin' to New York?"

"I—I've hitched my wagon to a star," she confessed.

"Well, well," said Skyblue. He made place for the girl, glad to have her at his side. "Are you sure that you've just hitched your wagon to it and ain't fixin' to be one?"

"I don't quite understand what you mean," Clarice confessed with interest.

Skyblue was gentle and paternal. "I don't know as it makes much difference," he averred. "Some of them go one way and some the other. It used to be the burlesque. Now it's the movies. But one or the other, or whether they stay in Millville or go to New York, or marry or stay single, Clarice, remember, it's all in being careful—being eternally careful; especially, Clarice, when a girl's as good-looking as you are, Clarice. Do you understand what I'm drivin' at, Clarice?"

"Yes, sir," she replied with a sparkling eye and heightened color; "you mean careful of your reputation."

"Jes' so," Skyblue agreed; "that's a part of it, in any case."

"What I want to do," Clarice pursued her thought, "is to serve."

Skyblue swallowed this with some surprise. "Serve!" he exclaimed. "Serve!"

"Humanity," Clarice explained, "serve my fellow men."

"Oh, mercy," said Skyblue. "Well, you won't find folks urgin' you to do anything else, puss; not in New York, at any rate—not a good-lookin' young girl like you. Only, when it comes to their payin'—you know."

"Ah, Dr. Godie," Clarice broke in, "as if you had ever thought of 'pay,' of money! Just to have seen you and heard you has encouraged me, inspired me. May I—oh, may I—come to see you some time—when I'm in New York?"

"Why, er, I'm seldom home—but, why yes!—write to me, pet—care of my learned friend—his laboratory, you know."

And Skyblue, curiously touched, gave a certain address on Seventh Avenue, New York.

Nature, or fate, or the design of things, has a habit of thus bringing together two widely divergent human threads in that intricate lace called life. Old Skyblue; the virginal Clarice! And who, among all the wise and experienced ones this day present at the Millville graduation exercises, could have guessed that these two were to come together again?—that his life and hers were to be intertwined, knotted, mutually shuttled through other lives, all to the end of some single design of tragedy and joy?

Not one, perhaps; and least of all old Skyblue, wise though he believed himself to be, or young Clarice Beldon herself.

CHAPTER III.

"HOPE SPRINGS ETERNAL."

IN her mind, ever since she had decided to leave Millville and advance on New York, Clarice Beldon had figured herself somewhat as a girl David destined to go over against some nebulous Goliath. She was full of Bible stories, old-fashioned precepts, an unspoiled—and also an untried—faith. By faith David had won his battle;

so she would win hers. She had come across Tennyson's lines:

> Howe'er it be, it seems to me,
> 'Tis only noble to be good.
> Kind hearts are more than coronets,
> And simple faith than Norman blood.

She loved those lines—had written them out in various of her school books, had quoted them in her graduation discourse. She had written them out on a little piece of paper which she put in her purse wth her railroad ticket. She knew that "right makes might," and that nothing bad could happen to you if you walked "by faith, not by sight."

But now, in the cold gray dawn and New York only fifty miles away, the heroic David-and-Goliath figure faded. This was more like a primordial ocean about her. New York—it had become a cosmic oyster. She herself was a mere animalcule, among a myriad others, borne in by a cosmic tide; and thus was the oyster fed.

If anything, the feeling was enhanced from that time on. The weather, the world, continued to be, so to speak, submarine—drizzly, gray. Yet not inert. The tidal suction was increasing. People, people—animalcules all of them—human infusoria—were being swept on toward the same destination by a thousand converging currents. These currents had caught other trains, countless motors; steamships, ferries, tugs; all of these converging, headed in the same direction, obedient to the demands, not of their own, but of the oyster's vast economy.

There had followed darkness, an increasing excitement; and here she was herself in some ventricle of the mammoth organism.

"Yes, ma'am; dis is de Noo Yawk Central," the aged colored man had told her, touching his red cap.

"He's already been digested," Clarice told herself. She would have liked to ask him whether it had hurt, and was he satisfied, and what his ambitions had been. But she merely showed him the address she had written on a slip of paper. He looked at this with studious detachment. She found his philosophical attitude soothing to her own restless and prancing nerves. "It's a friend of my aunt," she explained in her loneliness.

"Dat's in Harlem," Red Cap deduced, completing his survey of the document in the case. "You takes de subway; I'll show you whar." He picked up her suit case and led the way.

Could the New York oyster ever be hungry again?—Clarice wondered. Gorged it was. This, anatomically speaking, was the digestive tract—clogged, suffocating, yet thrilling to the electric vibration of that vast, imperious, blind but purposeful life.

She was a little dismayed to find that the colored man—perfectly kind, but perhaps incompetent—had put her in a train that was almost empty. Everybody else seemed to be going in the other direction. Finally, however, even at the risk of being laughed at, she confessed her predicament to the guard. He didn't laugh. He hardly looked at her, even—seemed to be absorbed in the test he was conducting of a mouthful of chewing gum. He nodded; and that was that.

"It must be," she told herself, "that Miss Dewbody lives in some quiet neighborhood—or in the country, even."

A sensation of deep disappointment took possession of Clarice. She felt cheated. Her place should have been in one of those trains going in the other direction. At every station she could see the pressing, anxious crowds on the opposite platform—men, women, children, but girls mostly—or, at least, so it seemed to her—girls like herself, only better dressed, wiser, awakened, human molecules that had already been assimilated, so to speak, by the cosmic oyster.

And in this oyster was there—was there a pearl?

She believed there was. It was a belief that became a conviction later on in this day.

Everything, it seemed, was turning out magnificently fine. In the first place, she had been on the right train after all; and the guard had seen that she got off at the proper place. Then a policeman, who must have weighed more than two hundred pounds, had personally directed her to Miss Dewbody's house, which hadn't been in an unpopulated region after all. Quite the

contrary—a small house that stood alone in its narrow, sunken lot, but upon which lofty apartment houses looked down overhangingly.

Then, Gosling!

In the meantime, though, there had been Miss Dewbody. She was a shriveled, efficient, little person—one who had lived in New York for thirty years and yet who herself, so far as looks, words, actions were concerned, might also have just arrived from Millville. It was Miss Dewbody who had put Clarice on Gosling's trail. The trail had been indicated by an advertisement in the morning paper:

> Young Ladies, genteel, uplift work; big money for the bright ones; come dressed in your best. Inq. Gosling.

"And the address is not more than a dozen blocks from here," Miss Dewbody had enlightened her. "If I were you I'd go right over and not waste a minute."

It may have been that the experienced Miss Dewbody had contemplated the possibility of having a discouraged and penniless girl on her hands. She could have been no unfriendlier to such an outlook, however, than Clarice would have been.

But Clarice had paused for a rather long interval outside of Gosling's shop—not fearfully now, although some puppy of misgiving had dogged her all the way over from Miss Dewbody's; it was gratefully, feeling that indeed here was proof positive of that pearl about which she had speculated earlier in the day. The proof was here in Gosling's window.

To a more experienced eye, this window would have revealed itself as that of a store only temporarily occupied—very temporarily. Not to Clarice though. She had an eye for the nature of the window-display only.

This comprised an almost countless variety of cards, some of them framed, some of them hung on ribbons, but most of them piled pell-mell in pseudo-artistic heaps. And all these cards were prettily, not to say beautifully, printed—delicate colors, attractive compositions in which babies and pansies, newly hatched chickens and fluffy white rabbits largely predominated.

The pearl, so to speak, though, made itself apparent in the literary material that was thus embellished. Each card contained a text, or a poem, or even a little essay designed to refresh—"to engladden," the word was Clarice's own—the human soul.

Anyway, the sun was now out and shining brightly on this display of cheerful philosophy and friendly advice.

She read carefully that little sermon entitled "Directions for the Ladies"—framed and ready for hanging. "Avoid contradicting your husband," it said. "Occupy yourself only with household affairs, and do not give advice to your husband till he asks it. Never take upon yourself to be a censor of your husband's morals, but practice virtue yourself to make him in love with it. Appear always flattered by the little he does for you, which will excite him to do more. Choose well your female friends—have but few, and be careful of accepting their opinions."

Possibly by the same author was this pretty sentiment: "A woman destitute of a love for flowers seems to us a mistake of nature. The delicate, the fragile, and the beautiful should have sympathies with all in nature that possesses the same qualities."

On a card containing a picture of kittens playing with a spool was the indisputable quatrain:

> Oh! Love is to the human heart
> What sunshine is to flowers;
> And friendship is the fairest thing
> In this cold world of ours.

Some of the sentiments expressed brought tears to Clarice Beldon's eyes. They were tears partly of contrition, partly of gratitude. To think that only this morning she had doubted the old precepts, their truth and efficacy, as applied to this great city. And yet here was the evidence before her eyes—evidence the worth of which was so well recognized, obviously, that great artists were willing to embellish it with pictures and a merchant would make it his entire stock in trade. Things like this:

> Early to bed and early to rise,
> Makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise.

Do not anticipate the happiness of to-morrow, but discover it in to-day.

Are you in earnest? Seize this very minute; What you do, or think you can, begin it.

There was something prophetic in this last. She swung around from it with a refulgent face suddenly aware that she was being stared at. She was—by a small and hatless head, a face that was mostly nose, and popping, pale blue eyes. The mouth was very indistinct, but somehow rather distinctly smiling.

"I'm Gosling," the mouth informed her.

CHAPTER IV.

"ALL THAT GLISTENS—"

"I SAW your advertisement," she explained, confused.

"Come in," he urged. There was a mellifluous quality to his voice, also the hint of a lisp. His walk was brisk and circumspect. She couldn't help remarking, though, that his legs were thin and rather bowed, that his feet were rather large. He was without a coat—properly, as the proprietor of the shop. He wore a striped blue shirt to which a celluloid collar was somewhat obviously attached by a formidable brass collar-button of the hinged type. Over his forearms he had drawn sleevelets of black muslin. Businesslike and efficient he seated himself behind a kitchen table that served him for a desk in the back of the storeroom. "Sit down," he invited—springing this as if it were a great surprise, a happy surprise, and indicating a small and none too solid camp-chair on his farther side.

Clarice obeyed. She was losing no detail. This was, she felt, a historic event in her life. After a moment or so of indecision, Gosling had prepared to write, with an indelible pencil, in a shabby school copybook, that apparently served him as ledger.

"Your name?" he began.

"Clarice Beldon."

He wrote, with a sort of passionate fondness. "Any previous experience, Clarice—er, I should say, Miss Beldon?" He was amused at his mistake.

"None," Clarice confessed.

Gosling fluttered—tried to write—hesitated. Finally, he put down his pencil.

"Oh," he proposed, "let's simply be friends! There's no use for all these formalities where you're concerned. You know, somehow, I trust you."

"That's very kind of you," Clarice returned, with reserve. "I like the cards I saw in the window. I'm very anxious to work and get ahead. I just arrived in New York this morning, but I know that anyone can achieve success here if he, or she, tries hard enough."

"Did you bring your family with you?"

"I have no family."

"Not even—er—a hubby?"

She shook her head.

One of her hands happened to be lying on the table. He stretched out his own hand and touched hers with a look in his eyes meant to convey a promise of luxury. Then a guardian angel, in the form of a shaggy old man, came into the front of the shop, and Gosling, all business, went briskly forward to greet him.

Clarice watched him—noticed again the warped and rather inconsequential legs, the ample feet.

"Pardon the interruption," he began, making something of a grab for her hand. "I was about to propose—"

"What did the poor old fellow want?" she inquired, and watched the shabby figure on the sidewalk.

"Pencils!" Gosling exploded, his thoughts elsewhere. "And you're hungry. I'm going to give you something to eat."

"Wanted to buy pencils?"

"Sell 'em! Beggar!" Gosling expanded. "Eggs, and I'll open a can of beans. This is my home, you know, right here in the back of the store. Come and look at it."

"I don't think I'd better," said Clarice.

"Why not?"—the little man seemed now to be fluttering all about her, surrounding her, literally. "Oh, come now. Let's be friends. Somehow, you know, I trust you. I like you."

"That's very kind of you," Clarice averred; "but I came here to talk business. I think that's what you ought to do."

"Afterward! Afterward!" Gosling sug-

gested brightly, and laid the forefinger of his right hand alongside his nose, waggishly.

"Now!" she maintained.

"But why?"

It was impossible to believe that his question was insincere.

"Because," she told him, "you should always consider business before pleasure—a minute wasted is a minute lost—and only those who are diligent can hope to get ahead. Besides, I don't think it's right for a stranger to ask a young girl to lunch with him, even"—she didn't want to hurt Gosling, for after all he had merely meant a kindness—"even if it is in his own home."

"Why not?" Gosling whispered, hypnotized.

"Because," Clarice was precise, "it might cause unfavorable comment."

"Not in this neighborhood," Gosling bubbled.

"Well, anyway," she pursued, "it would be a useless risk. A good reputation is anyone's most priceless treasure."

"I've already lost mine," he teased her, roguishly. "But I'm as you see me—able to set up and take nourishment, as Shakespeare says. You see, I have an education, too. What say to a little glass of wine—real Eytalian—passes it to me himself over the back fence."

Clarice had now risen and started to stroll toward the front of the store, Gosling treading on her heels almost.

"No, thank you," she had returned, with her first touch of asperity. And again he had countered with his why not? "Because"—she faced him—"disrespect for your country's laws ends in disrespect for your country's flag. And I don't think that anyone has the right to place temptation in the way of another."

The only word that Gosling seemed to catch was temptation. "Temptation," he repeated alluringly. "Temptation!"—and his ears went scarlet. "What sort of temptation?"

It was a frank bid for confidence, but Clarice had turned to the shelves—left there, apparently, by some former tenant—and from the lowest of these picked up a handful of cards which were part of Mr. Gosling's stock in trade. She began sorting these over, idly at first, then with a gradually concentrating interest. They were pretty cards, each with its gem of pure wisdom. She read some of these aloud:

"'He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.'

"'They are never alone that are accompanied with noble thoughts.'

"'To the pure, all things are pure.'"

A sort of gurgling sound, as Gosling cleared his throat, caused Clarice to look up. He met her look gladly, as it were.

"Got stuck on that bunch," he informed her. "Can't make 'em move. Not snappy enough. Got a good line of snappy ones—you know, the kind you don't dare put in the window. Riot! Come on! Back room!"

"And yet," said Clarice, remaining where she was, the cards still in her hands and attractive to her eyes—eyes that were as deeply blue as the forget-me-nots that garnished the last card she had read: "and yet these sentiments are so wonderful—I'm just sure the whole world stands in need of them, would buy them, and give them to friends—"

"Could let you have as many as you want at five dollars a hundred," Gosling advanced, with some rather unsteady comeback of commercial interest. "Sell 'em for ten. Hundred per cent. profit. Even the plug-uglies, the bats, and the cripples make that much. It's all in the spiel. For them it is. But you, you know, with your looks—oh, you Gertie!—I'd buy 'em back myself for two-bits—take four of 'em now—if you'll keep both of us from gettin' lonesome while we lunch."

Clarice, however, was thinking seriously. She was not offended by anything that Mr. Gosling had said. It was clear that he didn't know any better. She hoped to influence him, and believed she would, to take a more serious view of life, the value of time, the importance of making the most of your opportunities. But it was the world at large she was thinking of mostly, and how one could make this a better world to live in and, at the same time, get a solid grip on at least the first rung of success.

She had paid for one hundred of the

decorated cards in advance. For some time after she left the little shop, Gosling stood and goggled the five-dollar bill she had given him. He had a peculiar sense of being up against something which he couldn't understand. He had encountered many girls; but never one like this one—not quite like this one. But, now that he came to think of it, hadn't all girls something of that same quality in them—something ghostly—that Clarice Beldon had displayed, had somehow left behind her? Then for a moment, maybe longer, Mr. Gosling was almost inclined to be ashamed of himself.

Out in the street, with her package of wisdom under her arm, Clarice Beldon once more had the feeling that she was David and that this roaring town about her was, indeed, the giant Goliath. She felt a little helpless. She called upon her faith. She remembered with gratitude that address that dear old Dr. Godie, the hymnal agent, had given her on the night of her graduation.

CHAPTER V.

"'TIS AN ILL WIND—."

SKYBLUE—the Bishop, that is, or the Reverend Dr. Culbertson, of London, England, or rather, according to those cards he had recently used in Millville, Amos Godie, D.D., LL.D.—himself had returned to New York with some feeling that this was a giant that he was going over against. The giant was not an enemy exactly, nor yet was he precisely a friend. And far was it from Skyblue's ripe, not to say overripe, mind to slay the big brute. For him, this Goliath of modern civilization was merely something to be worked; to be made to come across, that is, share in all the good things of life of which it possessed such an ample store.

Right at the present moment he was taking his campaign seriously. Which was as it should be, seeing the all-fired rottenness of the cards that had been coming his way.

He sat there in his shirt sleeves, but with his plug hat shoved well back on his venerable brow, his gold-rimmed spectacles down on the tip of his nose. He was consuming finecut chewing tobacco rapidly—always a sign that he was under nervous tension. Now and then he would fork his snowy mustache apart and neatly spit between his fingers; but he was profoundly absorbed, not to say obsessed, by the business in hand. It was a business—and, to some extent, also an absorption—shared in by three companions.

One of these was Bull Tucker, friend of the Jersey Lil. He had that general carelessness of dress commonly affected by millionaires and others—derby hat, sweater, diamond ring. As he wouldn't shave until evening, and this was three in the afternoon, his broad jaw looked like sandpaper on which the sand had begun to sprout. He was Skyblue's *vis-à-vis,* as they say in polite society; but unlike Skyblue, Bull wore his hat down and forward instead of up and back. Thus his face was mostly jaw, what you could see of it. His nose was inadequate. It was only now and then that you got a sight of his small eyes—greenish, glassy, and fixed, like the eyes of a serpent.

This was when he shot a glance at Skyblue's spectacles—where there was a perfect reflection of such cards as Skyblue held.

Notwithstanding this, Bull, as well as Skyblue, had been losing steadily. They would have been the first to admit it—Bull would have, at any rate: Wiener and Doc were showing unusual form. Wiener was a small man with lips, nose, and ears which were, like the coat he wore, almost grotesquely oversized.

Bull made reference to Wiener's coat as Wiener revealed three aces and took the pot.

"Whoja t'ink you are—Hermann de Great or Houdini?" And Bull elucidated, unnecessarily most likely. "He'll be pullin' white rabbits out of his sleeves next."

Wiener was silent, but Doc spoke up in his behalf: "Nobody's cheatin'. This is a gentlemen's game."

A careful observer might have noticed a slight quiver of Doc's right eye at this point—this being his signal to Wiener to go a little easy for the next round or two. It was Doc who was the host of the party. These were the parlors of the Continental

Dentists, Inc., where the game was in progress. Doc, apparently, was moreover the only member of this scientific brotherhood present. Outwardly, Doc himself was all the gentleman, well nourished, very clean, the white service-jacket he wore only slightly offsetting or concealing his expensive, candy-striped, silk shirt. His collar was also silk, rather too high for comfort, so some might have thought, but firmly held in place over his bright knitted tie by a valuable safety-pin—a variant on the old variety, with imitation diamonds in it. As for the rest, Doc was completely hairless: head, face, everything—even to his eyebrows.

It was three thirty, though, when Wiener sprung his real surprise. Suddenly he had produced a watch from somewhere which he regarded with an air of surprise.

"Oi-gevalt!" he muttered.

"Nix," was Bull Tucker's retort.

As a matter of fact both Doc and Skyblue were regarding him with disfavor also, and it was clear that Wiener felt this general distrustfulness keenly. There were tears in his eyes and his voice trembled as he explained:

"Honest, it's court business. The judge will hang me. I ought to be there now already. As a witness—"

Just how unfounded were their suspicions he would prove, and produced a subpoena.

"Hornswoggled!" Skyblue exclaimed. Bull was grating his teeth. Doc was looking at Wiener as one might who tries to read another's thoughts.

"See you all to-morrow," said Wiener, slipping out of his chair and backing toward the door.

"You'll see me now," said Doc, and followed him out on the landing, shutting the door behind him.

Thus left alone in the parlors of the Continental Dentists, Inc., Skyblue and Bull contemplated each other. Skyblue was the first to speak. His voice was calm. There was a slight shake in it, but this was merely the quaver of reproof of an old, old man speaking to a misguided son:

"Don't look at me that way, Bully, my child. They trimmed me, too. They sure was slick."

"Gentlemen's game!" Bull grated.

"It's Wiener as has it," Skyblue sighed. He was going to be philosophical, set Bull a good example. "That is," he amended, "he's got whatever Doc's leavin' to him. They was workin' together."

"The dirty crooks!" Bull cut in.

Further comment on their part was interrupted by Doc's return. He came in cheerfully, whistling between his teeth. He apologized lightly for his momentary absence with an explanation: "Wiener owed me a couple of bones for dental work."

"Didja get 'em?" Bull was heavily ironical.

Doc was unruffled, not to say cold. "No one's stoppin' you if you've got somethin' to collect," he told Bull.

Bull came to, as they say. "Which direction did he go?" he inquired, rapidly pulling down his sweater and adjusting his hat for the street.

After the hasty exit of this second player Doc and Skyblue eyed each other affably but slightly on guard.

"How much did you hold out?" Doc inquired at last.

Skyblue didn't answer immediately. He had reassembled the scattered deck and was toying with this, as a student might with a scientific puzzle. "Well, I'll tell you," Skyblue came out of his abstraction. "Le's make jes' one cut fer—le's see—anything you've got!"

Not quite four o'clock when Doc went down the little brass-bound steps whither Wiener and Bull had preceded him. True, Skyblue had won the parlors of the Continental Dentists, Inc., together with the equipment, which wasn't much. But Doc was middling satisfied. He had managed to hold out on his own account quite a wad of ready money. And why should he tell Skyblue that the police were due to raid the place at five—Wiener's tip. And as to things like this, you could always ask Wiener; he knew. No use telling Skyblue. It would simply worry him.

Doc had, in fact, but a single regret as he bade this place good-by—forever, he hoped. On the stairs, coming up, he met a very beautiful young girl. She was neat. She was rosy. There was that about her

to recall to Doc's mind such girls as he had seen in the old days when he was pulling teeth at the county fairs. He pressed a little to one side to let her pass. Doc spoke up gently:

"Were you looking for some one?"

The girl turned with mild interest. "I believe that this is the right place," she answered, with neither suspicion nor alarm; "but I'm not quite sure of the floor. It was a scientific laboratory."

Doc looked at her for a moment in silence. "Was it for dental work?" he asked.

The girl smiled, showing perfect teeth. "Perhaps; I don't know. It was merely that I was trying to locate the Rev. Dr. Amos Godie."

Doc was a swift but cautious thinker. "Kindly inquire at the first door on the right," he said, indicating the door which he himself had just left. "I believe that that's him in there now."

Doc lingered on the steps. In a minute or two he himself went to the head of the stairs. He listened intently to what was going on inside. There was a moment when, although time was pressing, he was almost tempted to follow after the girl. He felt a little guilty. There were some things he wouldn't stand for. But after awhile he seemed to be reassured. He silently went his way.

CHAPTER VI.

"AS A MAN THINKETH—"

SKYBLUE still had his coat off and his plug hat on the back of his head when he discovered the girl at the door. He hadn't recognized her.

"I was jest about to shet up fer the night," he informed her, thus covering all things. Already something of a plan had evolved in that nimble brain of his—a brain that was never more nimble than when it found itself in the presence of beauty. Here he was in charge of a dental office, in a city where dentists were being turned out—hourly and by the hundreds, as he figured it—at a rate that would permit them to be hired at a salary rather less than that of the average hired girl. "My assistants do most of the work," he went on benignantly. "Still, I suppose I could give you a preliminary examination." The girl still hesitated. "There won't be no charges."

She was looking at him. Her eyes were very blue. She had an exquisite color. She was not very large, but well formed, straight and strong. Her whole presence radiated health. Also, it now struck Skyblue, an element of surprise.

"I—I didn't know," she was saying, "that you were a dentist."

Skyblue was now clutching at that nimble brain of his—trying, as he would have said, to make it come across. Where had he seen this girl before? Where had she seen him? In any case, he knew enough to play safe. He laughed a little and rubbed his hands.

"Come in—come in," he invited. "This is but one of a number of my enterprises. And jest, you might say, gettin' it organized. Pet plan of mine—good dental work fer them that can't afford these fancy prices." This girl was from the country, he could see; and most of his activities in the country had borne the philanthropic not to say religious stamp. "I didn't ketch yer name."

The girl had entered the office now. She looked askance at the cards on the table, where ordinarily there would have been a grimy coverlet and a pile of old magazines.

"Jest been playin' a game of solitaire," said Skyblue, putting things to rights. She hadn't answered his question. "What do you hear from yer folks back in—back in—"

The visitor had put down the package she had been carrying, making a place for it on the littered table. Then, deftly untying it, she had produced a number of large illustrated cards. These she contemplated with a touch of something almost like reverence before she spoke:

"I knew there had been some mistake."

"What about?"

"About those hymnals you sold—"

"Hymnals? Me?"

"In Millville," she completed, with her clear blue eyes lifted to his. "I knew you instantly, Dr. Godie. Don't you remember

—the day of my graduation—when you sat on the rostrum?"

"Well, well!" Skyblue intoned. "Well, well! Me! Dr. Godie!" He had got off his hat and into his coat by this time. He was feeling fit and proper. He went over to his caller and fearlessly, fondly beamed down at her through his gold spectacles. "Well, well!" he repeated. "And I betcha I know what first name he was usin', too. What 'll you bet me I can't guess it? Betcha it was Amos, wasn't it? Think hard, now—wasn't that what he was callin' himself? The old rascal! The old devil, and you'll forgive me usin' harsh words, won't you, pet?" But his tone was not harsh. A gentle warmth, a sense of pliant and elastic sympathy that was like an electric current, reached him from the girl's responsive eyes, filled his whole frame with a sense of well-being.

"I knew there was a mistake somewhere," the girl repeated.

Skyblue allowed tears to dim his own eyes; but he continued to smile bravely.

"His whole life has been a mistake," he said softly. "You've been talkin' about my pore half-brother—I call him that, although really he ain't no blood relation—"

"But he looks like you—dreadfully."

Skyblue was thinking fast. "That," he explained, "was what caused my poor ma to adopt him. 'He looked so much like my Sammy,' she always used to say. Sammy—that was me; and at the time I was took with measles and she was like to lose me. And so she took in Amos. Looked like me, but a viper—a viper. And to think that my own ma warmed him in her bosom, as the Good Book says." He was perfectly at home now, and ready for a friendly chat. He saw that the girl was properly seated—in Wiener's recent chair. He drew a chair up beside her. "Whatcha got there, pet?" And he prepared to look.

Once, long ago, these present quarters of the Continental Dentists, Inc., had been occupied as a fur shop, and then as a tailoring establishment, and after that as a chop-suey restaurant; next as the Hunyadi Local of the Dishwashers' Union, these tenants being succeeded by a jobber in hair dyes, and him by a Greek who maintained a Social and Recreation Club. As may be guessed, the building was an old one—one of the oldest on Seventh Avenue—brick, and only two stories high. Doc had followed the Greek. But all these tenants had left their, so to speak, perfumes here—to which Doc himself had contributed an added flavor, but not very strong, of mouth-wash and the cheap cologne to which he himself had always been partial. Added to this general and complex atmosphere was, of course, the aroma of the street—itself something complex and ancient, ranging from old vegetables to boiling tar.

And it was this sort of a smell that had always been sweetness to Skyblue. He had always found it satisfying, complete. Now, however, he discovered that he had been mistaken. There had always been a missing element in it. Doubtless it had been his subconscious knowledge of this that had hitherto driven him forth on his campaigns into the country—to sniff the new-mown hay, as he was wont to say; to refresh himself with a few inhales of pansies and buttercups, featherbeds and chicken gravy.

In the back of his brain he was thinking of these things now. It was as if all these things, and everything else that made the country dear, had invaded Seventh Avenue, invaded these particular premises—in the person of Clarice Beldon.

"Well, well," he muttered fondly. "Now that's a sweet and tender sentiment: 'Nothing is impossible to a willing heart.' Yes, I'll take this one, too—for my sister Amy's child. How many does that make now—an even dozen?"

It was the special aroma of the girl that was in his nostrils—and in his mind—all the time that he was sitting here beside her, talking to her, killing time, speculating on the generosity of that fate, either real or apparent, that had sent her his way.

For awhile he was visualizing her as his principal assistant here in the dental parlors—sort of a head nurse. She'd be classy in white—hold the gentlemen customers' hands while one of the dirty little hired dentists yanked a tooth. Build up trade, you know; and Skyblue could imagine a cue of Bull Tuckers and such, down the steps and up the avenue, all waiting to have

their hands held by Clarice regardless of what the dentist might do.

"And I'd take her out to lunch," said Skyblue in his thought—saw himself prancing into Beefsteak John's, handsome and grand, little Clarice on his arm.

But it wasn't merely physical, this aroma cast about her by the girl. It was an aroma that partook somehow of the quality of these things she had to sell.

"I particularly like this one," she would say; or, "I've found this one very successful: 'Virtue alone outbuilds the Pyramids; her monuments shall last when Egypt's fall.'"

"Mercy me," exclaimed the bishop in his heart; "is she stringin' me, or does she honestly believe it?"

But all the time that he was sitting beside her he was recalling that interview of his with her at the alumni banquet of the Millville Female Seminary, was recalling something of that brave valedictory address of hers. And he kept running over those cards of hers he had just bought.

"Vanity goeth before a downfall."

"Opportunity knocks once at every man's door."

There was something about all this that gave a prophetic value to the little poem on another card:

> Sing, sing, lily bells ring,
> The blossoms are coming to town—
> Daisies, and lilies and daffy-down-dillies,
> Each in a sweet new gown.

There was the crawl of something in Skyblue's innermost consciousness that promised something more than a dental office might give, even with Clarice Beldon in it dressed up as a Red Cross nurse. He was just beginning to let this feeling sink in, when there was a rowdy slam at the door and the cops came in.

CHAPTER VII.

"A FRIEND IN NEED—"

"ME and my niece," Skyblue began, getting to his feet. He brought up a sheaf of Miss Beldon's cards with him as an added alibi. He had recognized the fact instantly that something was amiss, and he knew, possibly from experience, that in cases like this "a stitch in time," etc., as the saying is. The cops were three in number. Only one of them was in uniform, but the others were as readily identifiable. To Skyblue they were flatties temporarily out of harness, central office bulls, plainclothes guns—dicks, in short.

These severally had given their attention first to the two tiny "operating rooms"—the cubicles inclosed by flimsy partitions where Doc and an occasional assistant had recently been engaged on a drift of suffering humanity—"extracting more than teeth," as Doc himself had put it in his franker moods.

"Me and my niece," Skyblue had repeated, trying to look very decrepit and innocent as one of the detectives turned. "Why, bless me!" cried this representative of the law. "If it ain't the bishop! Hello, there, grandpa!"

At this outburst the other detective had turned, paused to stare a moment; then he also had joined in with a boisterous greeting. Both these men appeared genuinely delighted to see the old gentleman. The officer in uniform himself was smiling. He had lingered at the door. But he was young and for the most part kept his friendly eyes on the girl.

Clarice had barely moved. Surprise and wonderment, and also a touch of fear perhaps, were holding her in something of a trance.

"We heard this place was for rent," said Skyblue loudly enough for the girl to hear. Meantime he sought and found the chance to look each detective in the eye. He gave them what he himself—and they also, doubtless—would have called an "office." He backed this up with a hasty whisper: "Don't wise her, boys; we're clean."

"Dicks have hearts," ran his ancient wisdom; but he wished he could tear the heart out of Doc, with his teeth, for letting him in on this mess.

"Who's in charge?" one of the detectives demanded loudly with an eye, not unappreciative, on the girl.

Skyblue remembered now. He had heard rumors about the big clean-up that was

under way of all fake dentists and sundry. His surmise was ratified as the second detective unhooked a diploma from the wall and regarded it with a sardonic grin.

"It was Doc who told me this place was for rent," Skyblue was declaring with dignity. "I met him not an hour ago at the Pennsylvania Station. He told me he was goin' straight—"

"Straight to Jersey," said the detective, unimpressed. He had taken some of the cards from Skyblue's hand and was looking at these with such fragments of interest as he was withholding from the girl. "So this is your new graft, is it? Hey, Cully," he called to his partner, "listen at this." And he read: "'Honesty is the best policy.'"

"I'm gettin' old," quavered the bishop.

"I'll say you are," the detective agreed with savage amusement. He tossed the cards on the table and crossed over close to Clarice. "Where'd the bishop pick you up?" he asked.

"I—I don't understand what you mean," Clarice answered.

It was quite clear that she was making a determined effort to understand. About all that she could make out of it was that something was wrong. Now that her first surprise had passed, however, she was more inclined to be indignant than frightened. She squelched with a look the detective who had spoken to her. She had risen slowly to her feet and partly turned to the friendly youth in uniform. Him she could trust. "I'm glad," she said, "that there's a policeman present."

Had a bold, bad burglar shot the detective in the stomach, he would have manifested about the same sort of a shock. "What—"

Cully, the other detective, laughed aloud. The young man in uniform had slipped a large and hairy hand in front of his mouth.

Clarice surveyed the situation through sparkling eyes. Her color had heightened. Almost any one would have found her exceedingly good to look at.

Skyblue sought to heighten this effect with a benignant word: "She's an orphelin, boys; her ma jes' died last week." He was getting the attention—a bit slowly, but surely. "She was my sister, you know; lived up in Millville. That's where I've been. She calls me up there and she says to me, 'Sammy,' she says, 'I ain't fer long; and you take my little chick, Sammy; she's all I got, Sammy,' she says; 'and you've got a heart of gold, Sammy; I know you have, Sammy,' she says, 'becuz of the way—'"

"Let's take the old geezer over to the house," said Cully, with bright efficiency.

"And the new moll," the other suggested.

The uniformed policeman, still cheerful, looked willing—took a step forward, dangling his club.

But the girl had ceased to hear or notice otherwise apparently these pressing material facts. In her moment of need her eyes had fallen on a card that lay apart on the dirty table:

"Perfect love casteth out fear."

There had come into her face an expression that gave pause to the others there—the young policeman, the two detectives, old Skyblue.

Down on the sidewalk below the little dental office a crowd had begun to congregate, then grow.

Two uniformed policemen from adjacent beats, themselves responsive to some mental radio announcing news—drifted simultaneously around distant corners, saw the crowd on the avenue, and headed this way from north and south, trailing their own small crowds behind them.

Small boys, very precocious, and furthermore having had experience of such things, were by this time spreading the glad news that the cops were making a raid. It was a scramble now as to who should be in the first row when the wagon backed up and the cops came tumbling out and the fascinating reflex began—maybe nothing but gamblers, but maybe, again, interesting ladies in kimonos, some of whom were almost sure to screech and fight to beat the band.

Now parking laws were beginning to be disregarded—delivery wagons, both horse and motor, light and heavy, slowing up and

coming to a stop. The sidewalk was overflowing. Those in the street were compensated by the rare spectacle, through one of the windows, of a young woman standing there talking to a man. Autos honked; the street cars clanged. As luck would have it, an ambulance came whirring down the street—but did not stop.

So far, it seemed, there had been but a single spectator of all this who hadn't been better than satisfied. As for the others, they were almost all laughing, hooting, cheerfully gossiping—the old Roman crowd in the Colosseum waiting for them to bring on the Christians. But this single exception among the spectators regarded the holiday, so to speak, with a sour and unshakable disfavor. This disfavor of his was all the more striking in that, ordinarily, the man who was now showing it would have been devoid of any expression whatsoever.

He was one of those men who suggest, somehow, overstuffed furniture without the idea of comfort conveyed by the latter. He was a large man, well over middle age, but of an impressive if not sympathetic dignity. He was soberly dressed in expensive clothing. There was something of both the head waiter and the funeral director about him, overlaid with something of the banker. He had a heavy face, smooth-shaven except for his brief, slightly gray "sideburns" and this face of his, usually ruddy, was now turning to an apoplectic black. At the same time his small, dark eyes—protuberant now under the stress of his emotion—had an angry glitter in them.

It required but a single glance at this face to urge the crowds round about the scene of the expected raid to make way for the owner of it. Even the two policemen—as ignorant as any one else as yet what it was all about—looked at him with respect as he made his way toward the entrance of the building. His progress was as easy as that of a walrus through a sea that is merely choppy. He asked explanations of no one.

The crowd saw him disappear up the stairs. It wasn't going to be long before things happened now. It wasn't. In about two minutes a young policeman in uniform came downstairs and began to buffet the crowd about, aided by his colleagues from the neighboring beats. The policeman was followed by two other men whom the crowd knew at once to be detectives. The detectives came alone. And now it required no shoving from the police to cause the crowd to dissipate. In less than a minute this part of Seventh Avenue had resumed its normal aspect.

"As I was sayin'," Skyblue informed the newcomer, "you arrived indeed as if in answer to my prayers."

The newcomer may have been listening to Skyblue, but he was looking steadily at Clarice Beldon. His recent wrath had almost completely subsided. He managed a sultry smile, made reference to Skyblue's remark.

"I believe," he said, "in divine intervention."

And somehow he managed to turn the word "divine" into a compliment for Clarice. His eyes hadn't left her. He was like a chemist submitting live tissue to a subtle acid. The reaction seemed to please him.

CHAPTER VIII.

"—BUT THINKING MAKES IT SO."

FOR a moment or so Clarice had met his gaze. Her eyes were clear and bright. But she felt an incipient moisture in them. She was just beginning to perceive how very close she had been to going to jail. At first the danger had been too grotesque, too utterly absurd, to have been quite real; now that the danger was past, however, the horror of it, and all that it might have meant, was growing on her. So she let her eyes drop to the card the stranger had given her.

"Mr. C. Welliver Whipple," she read.

"You see," he was explaining, "while I happened to be the owner of these premises—as well as considerable other realty in this portion of the city—"

His voice was fat. He had a gift for fat words. He had taken the chair close to her own, where Skyblue had sat during his examination of the illustrated texts.

"—I seldom, if ever, traverse this portion of the city," Mr. Whipple was saying. "Hence, I may say, a divine intervention—"

"Amen, brother," Skyblue here put in, making a strong bid for attention. One would have said that Skyblue had cocked a trained ear to Mr. Whipple's speech from the first. He had an air of remembering now. He himself had drawn up a chair. He had produced a handkerchief. He was moist. "But you are not," Skyblue went on—"I dare not hope that you are *the* Mr. Welliver Whipple—Mr. C. Welliver Whipple—"

Mr. Whipple did not answer immediately. He allowed the silence to become complete. He even waited until an annoying trolley car had passed. Only then he answered. The answer was to Skyblue's question, but his eyes were on Clarice. "I am he."

Clarice now uttered a little gasp and looked under the table. She discovered that it was the aged gentleman with the white beard who had brought his foot in contact with her own. She looked up, amazed. Skyblue, though, was giving his attention to Mr. Whipple, on whom he had suddenly discovered a small spider—"or was it some other bug?"

"Me and my niece," Skyblue was saying, "was hopin' to start a little philanthropy movement of our own." He shot a look so full of meaning at Clarice that she listened to him spellbound.

"What, may I ask, was the nature of your philanthropic enterprise?" asked Mr. Whipple.

Skyblue had just captured the supposed insect, it appeared, and flung this violently to one side before it could properly be identified.

Clarice was about to reply to this, but Skyblue bit in sternly.

"I have always made it a strict rule to foller the old Bible teaching," he proclaimed, "for the men to do the talkin' and the women to hold their peace."

That settled Clarice, all right—almost better than anything else could have done. She occupied herself by recovering her rather scattered stock in trade. They consoled her—these pretty pictures with their sublime and unshaken sentiments. These were truths; they were eternal; they gave her the sense of an Eternal Presence.

"Hold on, puss," Skyblue interrupted her; "I want to show them to our dear friend here."

For awhile Clarice had closed her eyes. She was trying to get a grasp on things. New York was still the whirling novelty about her, huge and dangerous. She had found Dr. Amos Godie, that venerable visitor to Millville who had so greatly inspired her. She was sure of that. There could be no other like him. Of this she was also sure, in spite of what he had said. But why should he have denied his identity? She didn't know. She forgave him—remembering the Apostle Peter and the crowing of the cock. That matter of the hymnals—she was sure this would be rectified. But why had the policemen acted as they had? Why had Dr. Godie said the things he had in reply to their questioning? Why had the dear old soul just now commanded her to silence? How could he claim that she was his niece.

It was as if Dr. Godie himself replied to her questions, answered her doubts. He was reading one of her cards aloud:

"'Judge not, that ye be not judged.'"

She opened her eyes and glanced at C. Welliver Whipple. He caught her glance and smiled. She returned the smile. Him she could trust. It had been divine—this intervention of his. In response to a prayer of her own—as well as Dr. Godie's—he had come.

"Day dreamin' again," Dr. Godie now spoke to her. "Thinkin' of your chums back in Millville." His voice and manner were so friendly, so almost tender, that Clarice felt a pang of conscience that she should have entertained those doubts concerning him. And she listened gratefully while the patriarch explained to the admiring Mr. Whipple how she had taken all honors at the Millville Female Seminary, also how good she was. They were getting to their feet. There was consolation, also, in the warm fraternity that had sprung up between them. They stood there, stomach to stomach, clasping hands, discussing her.

It was as if affection for her and love for humanity in general had softened both of them.

But Clarice was suddenly aware that good Dr. Godie was once more saying things about her that he scarcely had the right to say.

"Yes," he was affirming, with a sort of sad and gentle happiness, "I've always kept her, as you say, unspotted from the world."

Both men now turned to her. Mr. Whipple offered his hand. His voice was almost in embrace.

"Your uncle's bringing you to see me, little girl," he said. "I hope that it will be soon."

She had never seen such perfect teeth as Mr. Whipple's—exquisitely even and all of the same shade of bluish white. An impression of them lingered—like the smile of the *Cheshire Cat*—after he was gone.

When she and the elder man were alone she was once more submerged in a flood of questions. For awhile she kept her eyes averted, trying to quell the riot of doubts in her mind, trying to find some truly charitable explanation for the jumble of facts connected with the patriarch. It was several seconds before she could bring herself to look at him. When she did look at him finally she was smitten with pity and remorse. He looked very old and shaken. He had let himself sag down a little. Even his jaw sagged. There was distress in his eyes. His voice came out weak and tremulous.

"They've forced my hand, Clarice," he said. "There, there! Don't pay no attention to me. I ain't worth it."

He fumbled around with a shaking hand and found a chair. He sat down—stricken, overcome, without strength. Clarice also seated herself. She had a warm impulse to comfort the old man; and still her brain was clamoring for some sort of satisfaction. She would have to satisfy her brain. Sentiment, consolation, could come afterward.

"How do you mean," she asked, "that they forced your hand?"

"About me bein' your uncle," he replied, shakily. "I'm gittin' old—lettin' my heart run away with me. I should never have gone to Millville in the first place."

"Then you did go to Millville. That was a—a fib—about you having a half-brother who looks like you?" Skyblue made no answer—merely bowed his head, shaded his eyes with his hand—his left hand, the one with the sparkler on it. "Then," Clarice pursued, gently, "you are the Reverend Doctor Amos Godie?" Silence gave assent. "But why, in that case," she persisted, "did you refer to yourself as Sammy?"

"Go on," the stricken elder urged in a small voice. "Go on, Clarice; I ain't deservin' of nothin' but your reproaches—even if these do sound cruel."

"I don't want to be cruel," Clarice returned. "I'm merely trying to understand."

"How old was you, pet," Skyblue asked without looking up; "how old was you when your dear ma died?"

"It was when I was a baby," Clarice answered.

"That was when I was a missionary," Skyblue meditated aloud. "And all the other members of the family?"

"I was left all alone," Clarice replied. "At least, so I was always told by Miss Pringle, who brought me up."

"Not Mary Pringle?" Skyblue exclaimed, with some return of animation.

"Alice," Clarice corrected him with sincere feeling.

"Of the Millville Pringles?" the elder asked—without any great interest, apparently.

"I didn't know there were any Millville Pringles," said Clarice.

"That was before your time," Skyblue murmured. "Go on. What was it you was sayin', puss?"

"You see, Miss Pringle didn't bring me out to Millville from Oswego until I was nine, going on ten. That was when she was appointed English teacher at the seminary."

"She was tellin' me—"

"You mean you saw her before she died?"

Skyblue made hearty recourse to his handkerchief. "She could've explained so much!" he said, with sorrowful resignation.

"It was only because of the money she

left me "—and here the bishop gave a distinct start—" that I was able to go on with my studies," Clarice explained gratefully, using her own small handkerchief to touch her brimming eyes.

Skyblue had now emerged somewhat from his late grief and weakness—came up, so to speak, like Neptune, rising from the sea of troubles.

" Well, pet," he said, "you've learned me my lesson. You have. And I'm grateful. Oh-h-h, let this be a providential blessin' for both of us. Here's me, tryin to do good and messin' things up; and here's you mistrustin' me—no, I ain't blamin' you—mistrustin' me, your own flesh and blood, Clarice, and the best friend you got on earth. But you're young, Clarice. I fergive you. After all, now, just as the Good Book says, ' live and let live,' ' blood's thicker than water,' and ' birds of a feather flock together.' "

" But there were so many things I can't understand," Clarice exclaimed. It was a protest against her own stupidity rather than against anything else.

Skyblue was magnanimous now.

" What's that the Good Book says?" he demanded. " I see it just now on one of your pitcher cards. What was it?—' There ain't no bad nor good, but it's all in the way you look at it.' But you've got a right, pet, to know the truth—the whole truth and nothin' but the truth, pet, and it's like the Good Book says, ' there ain't no time like the present.' "

CHAPTER IX.

" HONEST CONFESSION—"

FOR awhile he sat stroking his long white mustache independently of his beard, and then his beard independently of his mustache. " Now, touchin' on this little fortune that Alice left you. That's the way we were. She was always Alice to me; I was Sammy to her."

" But why did your cards say Amos—Amos Godie?"

" Don't interrupt me, pet; we'll come to that. You know the Scripture sayin': ' One thing at a time.' It was your grandma—my own blessed old mother—that give me the nickname Sammy. Got it out of the Bible. She was like me, only better—always readin' the Bible. Did you bring it with you—the money dear Alice left to you?"

" Yes, sir," Clarice readily admitted.

" Now," Skyblue went on with philosophic detachment, " love is the greatest thing in the world. We've got to love each other. Oh, I know I ain't much; I'm rough; run away to sea when I was a boy, spent most of my life missionaryin' among the savages—in China, and Asia, and all those furrin parts. But I've made my own little fortune—not much, but plenty. I always have said, ' money's the root of all evil,' as Dan'l Webster put it."

" Oh, then, you can give them back the money for the hymnals," Clarice broke in gladly, " or send them other ones."

" I'm bad, Clarice," Skyblue chided her gently. " I'm frail. But I ain't sunk that low. I don't have to be reminded of a sacred duty, Clarice. Touchin' on those hymnals, I was but a dove among crows. But that don't excuse me. You can well scoff at me—but, there, there! No hard feelin's. Yon don't carry all that money with you, do you?"

" I left it with Miss Dewbody," Clarice told him; and, glad to be on safe ground, went at length into a description of the life and personality of this former schoolteacher who had been a friend of the late Alice Pringle.

When Clarice Beldon prepared herself for bed she always spent a long time brushing out her hair, which was long and brown and was filled with lighter strands that shone like pure gold. Later she braided her hair in a single loose and heavy plait that came to her waist. Then she exchanged some of the things she was wearing for an ample nightgown that covered her completely from chin to heels. Generally, at this juncture, she turned out the light, and completed her disrobing under the double cover, as one might say, of gown and darkness.

After that, as a rule, it was devotions, precisely in the manner she had learned as a child; then, the quick scurry—this also was a survival from childhood—into the

waiting boat, bound out across the lake of dreams toward to-morrow's dawn. But to-night as she got up from her knees she paused, went over to the door of her small bedroom and opened it. The voices that she had been hearing as a faint rumble all the time that she had been combing her hair and saying her prayers now came distinct.

She had no thought of eavesdropping. She was merely tender and grateful. She was happy that she had included these two speakers in her prayer. Wasn't it wonderful that the bishop had turned out to be her uncle after all? And to think that she had doubted him! The bishop was down there now—the Reverend—the Right Reverend, if he had wanted folks to call him that, only he was too modest—Amos Godie—and Godie had been the maiden name of one of her grandmothers, as he had revealed to her while they were still in the dental offices. Downstairs now this new-found uncle was drinking chocolate with Miss Dewbody.

They had taken a great liking to each other, instantly, and this was to be a boon for all concerned. The old gentleman, it seemed, only recently arrived from Canada where he had been on missionary service, had been looking for just such a home as he could make for himself in Miss Dewbody's spare room.

"Yes," she heard her uncle say with a note of gentle weariness, "all the policemen know the bishop; them as are new on the force hear it from the older ones. Won't let me alone! Always wantin' me to come in and tell 'em what I'm doin'. Used to sorter call me 'the chaplain of the Tombs'—spent so much time there."

"Dear old soul!" gulped Clarice, with tears in her eyes.

Everything was clear now—almost everything. Like a guardian angel, ever unseen yet ever ready to aid, this uncle of hers had gone about the world doing good—so he had explained—until she herself was about to go out into the world. Then, unable longer to deny the natural hunger of his heart, he had gone to Millville there to indulge his old eyes—as he himself had put it—with a sight of her who was all that remained to him of kith or kin; had done this, it appeared, because he had decided to leave her that modest yet ample fortune recently bequeathed him by a convert of his in Australia.

"And touchin' on that," Clarice heard the bishop now remark, as Miss Dewbody insisted that he take another piece of cake, "mebbe it would be just as well if we took steps to invest the dear child's own little fortune—somethin' sound. Certain friends of mine—bankers, brokers, lawyers."

"What fortune is that?" Miss Dewbody demanded with bright interest.

"The bequest left to her by Miss Pringle," the Bishop replied.

"Where is it now?"—Miss Dewbody was quite excited.

Skyblue may have had a glint of suspicion; but he covered this. He licked his mustache and spoke with deliberation: "Why, Clarice tells me she brought it with her—all that there was left of it after her education"—he was leaving the main point to the last—"and," he concluded with carefully spaced words, "put it into your hands."

"My hands!" Miss Dewbody cried, with unmistakable innocence. "So that's it!"

"That's it," the bishop returned, with the quiet mastery of one who holds the whip hand. "Jest how much did it happen to be?"

"Eighteen dollars," Miss Dewbody replied, "eighteen dollars and fifty cents."

In the rather long silence that followed, Clarice slipped into bed and heard no more.

"I think," Skyblue had said, as a matter of fact, a little later on—"I think I'd better drop down to the vicarage and see about my personal effects."

He had bade Miss Dewbody good night, told her not to wait up for him. She had let him take a key to the front door, but he wasn't sure that he was going to return. In any case, he felt the need of earnest thought. He wanted to be alone.

There were at least three places that he may have had in mind when he referred to "the vicarage"—three furnished rooms in rather widely scattered neighborhoods where he kept various effects of his. There was one in Harlem. There was another in the lower West Side—that part of New York

which used to be known as Hell's Kitchen, but was now quietly respectable. The bishop had a third home, which he occasionally found convenient; this was in Chelsea.

On the whole he was known extremely well, but not unfavorably, to the New York police. On occasion he could be useful to them—had been exceedingly so once or twice in the remote past. Certainly not for many years had he given them any work to do.

But the freshness, as he termed it, of the detectives to-day had frayed his nerves. And his contact with Clarice Beldon had given him yet another sort of itch.

"You've got to make a killin'," he told himself, "or nobody will respect you. And I sort of feel lucky—with you to help me, little Clarice."

He descended into the nearest subway booth. As a meek and befuddled old man he managed to get through the gate without dropping his nickel—just as the train was pulling in. Soon he was merrily bowling south. All who looked at him—even the little boys, sappy-faced and tough, returning from some Tom Mix or Bill Hart movie—could see how kind and benignant he was as he smiled at them.

It was to that home in Chelsea that he repaired—a small hotel without any outer signs of life about it, in a rather poorly lighted neighborhood. Skyblue passed straight through the office of the hostelry, where a Swede porter merely opened one eye; he descended a flight of steps to a rather large subterranean room moderately crowded with ladies and gentlemen. There was a vacant table in the corner; and toward this Skyblue made his way, pausing only to acknowledge an introduction here and there, twit some girl playfully about her looks or the sort of company she was keeping.

But he preserved his solitude—for the present, he did; eased himself into a chair. For quite a long time he sat there deep in thought, motionless, eyes shut. One would have thought he was asleep if it hadn't been for his occasional movement when he scratched his jaw or raked his beard with his fingers. Then he started happily in response to some sudden inspiration. He looked about him. He crooked his finger at some one through the faint blue fog of cigarette smoke that filled the room.

"Oswald," he said thoughtfully, as the proprietor came up to him, "what was some of those things you was tellin' me? No, you better get a bottle—some of that pre-war Bacardi."

It was not until Skyblue had analyzed, so to speak, his third specimen of the bottle's contents that he returned to his question. By this time the proprietor was more than ever anxious to please. He was a small man of foreign extraction with a keen but not very ample wit; and somewhere, that afternoon, Skyblue had read something about conscience making cowards of us all. Oswald bent close.

"What was some of those things," the elder now completed his question, "that you was tellin' me about this party named C. Welliver Whipple?"

CHAPTER X.

"OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS ONCE—"

WHATEVER it was that Skyblue had found out about C. Welliver Whipple, he had determined to call on that gentleman with no great delay. It was Clarice who had made the engagement over the telephone—at Skyblue's dictation. It was the last horse-drawn hack in Central Park that carried the old gentleman to his destination—from about a hundred yards back in the Park to the house on Fifth Avenue, just opposite the Park, which was C. Welliver Whipple's rather awe-inspiring place of residence.

Mr. Whipple himself was at the window looking out and down when the caller arrived. He had been hoping that Clarice Beldon would accompany the old gentleman; but his disappointment rapidly faded. There was something so benign in the spectacle of the white bearded patriarch—plug hat, frock coat, ivory topped cane—getting down from the old horse-drawn vehicle—that it would have softened a heart of granite. And, somehow, this picture rounded out Mr. Whipple's memory of Clarice herself.

He knew it now: he had been almost on the point of doubting Clarice—of believing that she was almost too good to be true. They didn't make girls like her any more. This was the jazz age; all the newspapers said so. Girls bobbed their hair, talked slang, smoked, had their own bootleggers, knew more than their grandmothers did. Then, Clarice! A buttercup! A primrose! A pansy!

He greeted the Reverend Doctor Amos Godie,—as the meek and respectful man-servant had announced him—at the door of the sumptuous and heavily sedate room that served him as library and also, to some extent, as office.

"Mebbe I hadn't ought," said Skyblue, after the greeting was over, "to have kept the carriage waiting. I forgot to tell Dugan—dear soul, he's been drivin' me about for years."

"My man will tell him," said Mr. Whipple.

"Hold on, till I find my chink"—and Skyblue began to fumble. "I give him a dollar."

"That's all right," smiled Mr. Whipple, who loved innocence. He nodded at the man-servant, who understood and disappeared. This flustered Skyblue who, however, reconciled himself to the circumstances by writing in a little notebook. "And what, may I ask," Mr. Whipple gleamed, with his bluish-white smile, "are you putting down—a record of your indebtedness?"

Skyblue didn't answer immediately. He had seated himself. He was grave and reverend while he finished his little task, then explained:

"I've done that for years," he said; "a little weakness of mine—if it's only a penny, pass it on; every little deed of kindness, pass it on; every little ray of sunshine—"

His recent agitation had now completely disappeared. He was looking at his host with smiling benevolence.

"My niece," he said falteringly, and paused long enough to measure accurately Mr. Whipple's reaction to the word, "is even more set on doin' that than I am. It's been 'dear Mr. Whipple this' and 'dear Mr. Whipple that' ever since she saw you, and all keyed up to pay back—sort of all eagerness. What's that the Good Book says about thanks servin' as checks for the poor?"

"Beautiful child," Mr. Whipple intoned. "But what is this you were telling me about some philanthropic enterprise?"

"I don't quite ketch you," Skyblue averred, although this was the chief end of his visit. "Oh, yes," he recollected after the rich Mr. Whipple had refreshed his memory. "You mean those mottoes that we were sort of scatterin' around. We've got so many little plans fer doin' good. I'm glad you mentioned that. It sort of busted her up. Her eyes was so red, that's why she didn't want you to see her this morning."

"Eyes red—not from weeping, I hope," said Mr. Whipple.

Skyblue was touched with tender remorse. "I've only got myself to blame," he said. "I shouldn't have let her associate with the young man. But, what will you?"—and here the old gentleman had a near-spasm of grief: "I'm that trustin', and her even more so!"

For a moment Mr. Whipple's eyes glittered. When he spoke he did so with an air of holding his breath: "You mean—she misplaced her trust—in a young man?"

Skyblue evaded the question. "I sometimes tremble," he said; "she's that young and pure and trustin', sort of; and folks do tell me she's beautiful; and generous—but unspotted, unspotted." He took a photograph from his pocket and passed it over to his host. "That was her in her graduation dress," he said. "I had it took before we come up from Millville. I carry it with me always. She's all I've got."

Mr. Whipple studied the picture rather more than he intended should be apparent. It was a photograph that any one could have looked at without effort. Even the simple artistry of the Millville studio that had produced this portrait enhanced its value—an added touch of country perfume. Mr. Whipple's breath went deeper as he listened to his caller's naïve story of simple faith and altruism.

"I've had many titles," Skyblue was confessing with all modesty, "but the one I

always cherished most was the one the little children give me when I was engaged in my missionary labors in the London slums. It was with the idea of gettin' Clarice started along the same lines that I rented that little shop over on Broadway—maybe you've seen it—pitcher-cards with bits of wisdom and poetry on them. And I put Clarice in charge of it, and she hired a young feller by the name of Gosling. Oh, he put a little money into it, and Clarice, with her ideas about gratitude."

"Beautiful child," said Mr. Whipple, wrenching his eyes from the photograph.

"The title the children gave you," he bit in at the point where he had lost track of what Skyblue was saying.

"The Motto Man," Skyblue answered.

"The Motto Man!" Mr. Whipple exclaimed.

"I see you've heard of me," Skyblue came across, bashful but pleased. "Well, that ain't surprisin' the way they wrote me up—in the *War Cry*, and the—oh, all the church papers. Well, you see him before you now: the Motto Man."

"And so," said Mr. Whipple, toying with the photograph.

"That was the enterprise I wanted to get Clarice started in right—start a little shop for her, down among the lowly, scatter sunshine. And it'd pay, too, now that I'm free to sort of take charge, with my name and reputation, and Clarice doin' the active work and consultin' with the banker or the merchant or the rich widder-lady—or, there won't be any trouble to find the capital among so many good souls."

"Just how much do you think would be necessary," Mr. Whipple inquired.

Skyblue's emotion likewise was veiled as he made answer.

It was down near the foot of the Bowery, just where the thunderous old Third Avenue "El" curves and expands into the dark acreage of Chatham Square, that Skyblue, the bishop, formerly, the Reverend Doctor Culbertson, of London, England, but henceforth—and forever afterward, as he fondly hoped—the Reverend Doctor Amos Godie, recently of Canada, Australia, China, and so forth, had found the premises suitable to both Clarice and C. Welliver Whipple, but mostly to himself "Home is where the heart is," as one of his new mottoes stated it. Also, "Absence makes the heart grow fonder." And then, there was that longer quotation that Skyblue could never read without tears in his eyes—it made him laugh so much: "I love everything that's old; old friends, old times, old wine."

"Wasn't this place once a liquor saloon?" Mr. Whipple had inquired.

"Oh, mercy!" Skyblue had parried. "Well, it's like Clarice says: 'Good to forgive, best to forget.'" He could have told them many a jolly tale about this old place, and the friends he had known here, when it was still the Commodore. Those were the good old days! Where were they now: Bluetooth Emma, One Mitt Moriarty, Preacher Smith, the Confidence Man; Curly Lou, Solly Mock, the white Chink? The place was full of ghosts. "No," Skyblue resumed, "I ain't superstitious."

It was Clarice who had furnished the name for the store. This name was done in blue and gold, with Gothic initials:

YE SUNSHINE SHOPPE.

"It is you who furnish the sunshine," Mr. Whipple had offered to Clarice on this, his first tour of inspection.

Tears of gratitude were in the girl's eyes.

But to Skyblue, who happened to be glancing toward the street just then there came a vision to recall one of those ghosts he had just been thinking about. It was the vision of a face pressed against one of the front windows. How long it had been there he didn't know. He gave a quick glance to see whether the others had noticed it. Apparently they hadn't. When he looked again the face was gone. It had been a woman's face. But whose?

CHAPTER XI.

"HELL HAS NO FURY—"

"LOOK at me again and take your time," the woman had said with bitter cheerfulness.

"I gotcha the first time," Skyblue hissed through his beard. "Keep your voice

down." Aloud he said: "We're not quite organised, sister. Now, this is a pretty one." And he held up a motto-card big enough to conceal his own and the woman's face from Clarice and Mr. Whipple. "I gotcha, Milwaukee," he whispered with cogent venom. "But git out. Come back to see me to-night—here—ten o'clock."

During his conversation with the lady, the bishop, in a loud and hearty voice, read the couplet from Burns:

> "My love is like a red, red rose,
> That's newly sprung in June."

His memory hadn't failed him. He had known her even before she had won that sobriquet of hers—when she was still plain Milly Walker, that name the Bowery had converted. She had been beautiful then. There was even a trace of that beauty left in her lean, dark face—a sense of beauty conveyed chiefly, perhaps, by her burning eyes.

"Like a 'red, red rose,'" Skyblue repeated with unction.

"The big stiff!" she retorted in a whisper. Those burning eyes of hers had never left C. Welliver Whipple except for one baleful glance at the girl at his side. "I thought I'd find him stringin' a kid. I got half a notion—"

Skyblue read a new motto: "'Some people are so fond of ill luck that they run half way to meet it.'" Then this: "'Be silent and safe—silence never betrays you.'" On his own account he added softly and swiftly: "Lam!"

Milwaukee lammed—meaning she went away—Skyblue calling her sister and effusively inviting her to come again.

There for a time as Skyblue sat alone that evening in the back room of Ye Sunshine Shoppe he reflected pleasantly on the text that "Virtue is its own reward." The text, beautifully printed in red and black letters on a blue field, framed and with a glass over it, hung just over that door through which oceans of beer had once flowed from the barroom of the Commodore to the customers who preferred the privacy of this inner chamber.

And where were they now, these customers? Skyblue asked himself. Some of 'em up the river, in Sing Sing; some of 'em in Matteawan, Joliet, Leavenworth, San Quentin. Others had gone West by way of Bellevue and the morgue. Yet others, even less fortunate perhaps, still lingered on—panhandlin', flyin' the banner, eatin' out of ashcans, glad to git a pad in a scratch-house.

"And look at me," Skyblue soliloquized with justifiable pride; "settin' pretty, snug and warm, friend of a millionaire, this here virtue of mine sort of rewardin' itself."

He was half reclining in a large Morris chair. There was a large electric heater at his side, for the night had gone cold—one of those windy, dust-ridden autumn nights with winter already thumping at the door. The contrast between outdoors and in heightened the old gentleman's sense of well-being and rectitude until he could imagine himself as a bishop in fact—lawn sleeves, big church, choir singing hallelujah for all it was worth.

He gave a start. He must have dozed. That was the Salvation Army singing out there. He blinked his eyes open, then discovered that he must have forgotten to lock the door. His visitor was standing in front of him.

"Hello, Milwaukee," he greeted her.

"Just like old times," she returned; "slippin' in through the ladies' entrance and findin' you here." She listened while the salvationists reached a new pitch of joyful song—"Can it be for Me?—Can it be for Me?"—"Gee, I feel punk," she said, dropping into a chair.

Skyblue watched her with a keen but rather detached interest as she found a cigarette and lighted it. "Where you been keepin' yourself?" he asked.

She swallowed her smoke, then exhaled it slowly as her eyes found his for a moment. "I've been letting others do the keeping for the last year or two," she answered cryptically. "Those English judges are fast workers. It's a good thing for you, bishop, that you helped me once when I needed help, or I would've gone right up to that fat stiff this afternoon and scratched out his eyes."

"Well, well," Skyblue murmured with

polite interest. "I sort of felt there was somethin' wrong."

"I'll say there was—and is," the woman replied. "The last thing I promised Johnnie when they sprung me was to look up this C. Welliver Whipple person and make him feel sorry."

"Riddles are sort of out of my line," said Skyblue.

"It was this way," the former Milly Walker stated complacently, resolved to make herself clear. "I suppose you know he's the first man I ever got married to."

"I never knew that," Skyblue confessed.

"Neither did he," said Milly, "until he saw the papers he signed when he was stewed. You know, he thought he was double-crossing me, an innocent young girl; and I just sort of double-crossed him—with the aid of Preacher Smith. And I suppose you know there was a baby in the case."

"Hisn?"

"Hisn!" Milly replied with cool irony. "Also mine."

"Yes, yes; and I begin to recollect—"

"How he got me sent over the road the first time," Milly prompted the bishop's memory, "so's he could get rid of me. It's like this last time, when he learned that Johnnie and I were on the English boat with some old securities that Johnnie thought they'd forgot all about. It was C. Welliver Whipple who cabled the tip to Scotland Yard. They were waiting for us when we landed."

"Well, well," droned Skyblue. But for the moment he was communing with himself. He came out of a reverie.

"Milly," he spoke up—"touchin' on that baby."

Her throat swelled a little. There came a hint of moisture to her bright eyes. "I lost track of him—"

"A boy," he mused. "And Whipple—he knew it was a boy?"

"Sure!"

"I was hearin' certain things about Mr. Whipple the other night," said Skyblue—"hearin' 'em from a certain friend of mine whose ma used to know a cook who was a friend of a man who used to take care of Mr. Whipple's house when Whipple himself was away—"

The Army of Salvation had moved on long ago. The heavy traffic of the Bowery and Chatham Square shuttled back and forth without rivalry now to its material thunder. Even the lights of Chinatown were going out, when Skyblue and the woman who had been Milly Walker finally emerged from the back room of Ye Sunshine Shoppe and paused for a final word of farewell.

"Yes, you're right, Milly," Skyblue admitted with gentle tolerance. "It's as you say, they're the bunk, those mottoes. But now and then you sort of find one that hits the nail on the head. You know, 'It's a long lane that has no turnin',' makin' it different from what that other motto says about the worm."

"And I'll give you a motto you can send to Whipple," said the woman, still hard but sufficiently pacified to smile. "I ran across it while I was doing time, and it reminded me of him."

"Which was that?" inquired the bishop.

She quoted: "'Hell has no fury like a woman scorned.'"

The bishop brooded over this as he rode uptown. "I'm glad I never scorned none," was the current of his thought.

Late as it was, a wide-eyed baby jounced in its mother's arms and regarded him with interest from across the aisle. Skyblue, immersed in his thoughts though he was, made playful signals to the infant. The child recalled what he had heard about Milwaukee's child—the little child she had abandoned before her first trip to prison. Well, well, he might still live to do a little good in the world. He felt virtuous, and virtue brought with it a sure reward—the Good Book said so.

He thought of this again as he let himself softly into the chaste hallway of the Dewbody home. In the front room, which had become his own, there was a pan of chocolate standing ready on a little electric heater. There was an easy chair under a floor lamp with the evening paper neatly folded on its arm. And as if all this were not enough, he saw that the ladies of the house had been yet further thoughtful of his comfort. On the paper lay a pair of soft and heavy hand-knitted socks.

The bishop beamed.

" Foot warmers," he identified. He luxuriously clad his bare feet in them before crawling into bed.

CHAPTER XII.

" BIRDS OF A FEATHER—"

IT was Clarice's idea to serve tea every afternoon in that back room of Ye Sunshine Shoppe. It was all part of her campaign to shed light among the lowly. And although it had been Skyblue himself who had formulated this campaign —put it into words—this was something that Skyblue hadn't foreseen. The fact that Skyblue himself was there much of the time, and that Ye Sunshine Shoppe occupied the former premises of a thoroughly matured, not to say tough, commerce in strong drink —with occasional knock-out drops on the side—exerted a peculiar fascination over a good many former denizens of the place.

Wiener blew in—" on legal business," as he explained to Clarice with undisguised friendliness.

" Vare's the old gentleman?" Wiener had asked.

" You mean Dr. Godie?" Clarice had demanded.

She was so cordial that Wiener was thrown off his guard. " ' A rose mit any other name—' "

Fortunately, Skyblue, at work in the back room on a new Dream Book, heard that familiar voice. He jumped for the door just in time to give Wiener a hasty " office " to lay off.

" Ah," said Wiener, reading the danger signal aright, " there is the doctor now. Good news from the Supreme Court, doctor—"

" It 'll be the coroner's court fer you, you dirty little rat," Skyblue had imparted to Wiener when he had him alone in the back room; " and you won't be doin' the talkin'."

Wiener winced. There was something about this old gentleman in his moments of rage that could throw a scare into the best of them.

" I thought she was kiddin' me, and I was merely kiddin' back," Wiener took up his own legal defense. " You know how it is when a jane smiles at you—"

" Shet yer face," Skyblue commanded. He added that Wiener talked too much with his mouth; but he was becoming mollified, both by Wiener's own apologetic attitude and the logic of the occasion. Here was something that would have to be attended to now, and Wiener could help him. " Get this right," he said. " Who'd she say I was?"

" Dr. Goody."

Skyblue showed Wiener the top sheet of a consignment of stationery that had just come in.

" Read it out loud, sort of soft and distinct," he ordered.

Wiener was like a schoolboy doing a difficult recitation:

" ' Ye Sunshine Shoppe '—excuse me! I didn't go to laugh."

" The rest of it," Skyblue persisted.

" ' Office of Amos Godie, D.D., LL.D., the Motto Man.' "

" That's me," said the bishop.

" ' Clarice Beldon, secretary,' " Wiener finished his reading.

" And that's her," Skyblue announced impressively. " She's my niece, and all square. Get it and wise the boys. Everything she says is right. She don't make any mistakes. If she says I'm Santy Claus, er Mayor Hylan's grandpa, er the man who converted Billy Sunday, why, that 'll be all right, too; and the first egg that makes a crack's goin' to smell a lot worse than he does naturally. Frank and honest, now, Wiener, do you get me?"

" Sure!"

" Then, pass it along."

But Wiener couldn't see everybody—notably Bull Tucker, who had been sojourning for a few days in Hoboken, where Doc, late of the Continental Dentists, Inc., had dreamed of starting a beauty parlor with the coöperation of the Bull's girl, commonly known as the Jersey Lil. But Bull himself had put his foot down on that—lacking confidence, perhaps, in Doc's way with the ladies. Anyway, here were Bull and Lil and Doc all back in dear old New York again, and " sort of," as Doc himself put it, " looking up their chums."

Skyblue was suspicious of these old friends of his. Still, he wanted them around. If certain new plans of his went through—and Wiener, as his legal advisor, assured him that the time was ripe—he was going to need all the trusted assistants he could find. His Dream Book was progressing—"every dream a gig"—and all it needed was a man like himself, with the proper backing, to get the good old policy game to going again. Trusties out everywhere, selling Dream Books *and* policy—mottoes as a stall and a side line, sort of—

Bull Tucker was so struck by the appearance of Clarice Beldon that first time he came into Ye Sunshine Shoppe that he couldn't immediately express himself. It had been merely a part of his natural caution to get a line on the place. He had been doing this now for a couple of days, and had seen the bishop come and go.

It was when old Skyblue—always something of an enigma to Bull—was safely out that Bill strolled in. He felt that he presented a gentlemanly appearance—sweater, derby hat, smoking what might have been an expensive cigar; perfumed as he was, moreover, having but just now left the basement pitch of Tony, the barber. But as Clarice—bright-eyed, clear-complexioned—prettily turned out in fresh gingham, advanced on Bull with a wondrous smile, that gentleman very nearly, as he put it later, "swallowed me rope," an allusion, of course, to his Havana.

"May I show you some of our mottoes?" Clarice inquired. It happened that she and this new customer were alone in the shop. She had just got through serving an old lady and two children. Business had been a trifle slow, but "hope springs eternal—" She was genuinely glad to see the man in the sweater. After all, he was obviously of the class that she and her dear old uncle desired most to reach.

"Sure," said Bull, looking the little lady straight in the eyes. She was something new in molls. Already he was beginning to think that if Lil was so crazy to have Doc for a steady, why, this little dame—

Clarice had met his smile. It touched her that a person like this should be looking for mottoes.

It just showed how the world was apt to misjudge.

"May I ask," she encouraged, "if it's for some special occasion?"

"I'll say it is," Bull replied.

"A birthday?"

What was the kid trying to do—string him? Other girls had tried that. "Not at all; not at all," he purred. "It's a racket at a swell dump over in Rivington Street, and I'm lookin' for a partner."

"Oh, I see," said Clarice—although she didn't, not quite. Her clear blue eyes had never wavered from Bull's green ones; but a slight stain of extra color had come into the tinted alabaster of her cheeks. "I think that we can find something," she supplemented, and turned away, kindly, thoughtfully.

Bull watched that trim figure of hers and slowly chewed his cigar.

"Any of these," said Clarice, returning from a shelf, "would be suitable for a young lady. Most of them we have framed, also, but like this they are cheaper and just as effective. They are already punctured, you see, so they could be hung with a ribbon."

Bull was so hypnotized he could merely stare. But he saw it was up to him to say something. For a time, as he was willing to admit to himself, that wise-cracking brain of his was taking the count.

"You read 'em," he said. "I ain't got me glasses."

Clarice did so, standing almost under the shelter of his arm. He may have reflected even the deadly work this same arm had done where waists far more formidable than this present one were concerned—so slim, so supple. But he was listening after a fashion, charmed, as it were, by both music and words—the music of Clarice Beldon's voice, the words of forgotten sages:

"To the pure all things are pure."

"Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright."

"Better is a dinner of herbs where love is—"

The Bull, breathing heavily, purred a question:

"How long have you been trainin' with Skyblue?"

" Pardon?"

" Wit' the bishop?"

" Oh, you mean my uncle—Dr. Godie?"

" Come here a minute," the Bull invited in a tone he sought to make gentle and compelling. He didn't want to start any rough-house; but this girl was suddenly appealing to him as a plate of beefsteak and onions would appeal to a man who was starving. The figure was his own. It was lonely here in Ye Sunshine Shoppe. The thunderous rumble of the Elevated had been known to deaden the sound of a revolver shot in the good old days, let alone any squawk a chicken might make.

CHAPTER XIII.

" OLD FRIENDS ARE BEST."

AS luck would have it, though, Mr. Bull Tucker himself had been under observation, more or less, for several days—in fact, ever since the return of himself and of Lil and of Doc, from what they called " the sticks," meaning the wilds of Hoboken, which were all of two miles away from the center of things. But Lil, who was sore at Bull—" off of him," as she put it—because of Bull's interference with her plans of helping Doc with his beauty parlor, had evolved the clever scheme of getting Bull jailed—nothing serious, just for thirty days or so. Doc had gallantly offered to serve as her escort. They liked each other; and, frankly, Bull was becoming impossible.

" Getting so now," Lil had complained, " I got to even tell him where I pass my nights."

They had spotted Bull as he entered those premises that once had been so familiar to all the cognoscenti as the Commodore.

" My Gawd," said Lil as she read the new sign.

" Pipe Bull," urged Doc, who had discovered his rival already deep in converse with Clarice.

" I'll do more than pipe the big stiff," said Lil, with ladylike self-possession. She had intended fully to desert Bull—to give him the razz—but why should he be getting fresh with another girl when, as the saying is, he didn't have nothing on her yet? She was starry-eyed as she strolled into the shop.

Doc lingered at the door, with one eye to the cops and another for a get-away. He had been a witness once in a criminal case. It was as bad as if you was the crook yourself. Ask any one.

Lil strode straight up to where Bull and Clarice were standing. It was at precisely that critical moment when Bull's conscience might have served as his own worst accuser.

" Why, hello," said Lil with ironic hauteur, " what are you doing here?"

Bull was mad enough to swat her one—for a " gool," as he himself would have said. But, and for the first time in his life, he felt that he was blushing.

" I was just buyin' some mottoes," he advanced lamely.

" Oh, you was," Lil returned.

She now stared fixedly at Clarice, half inclined to spoil that young lady's looks—to do this swiftly and effectively with her finger nails.

Clarice met this glance merely with gentle abashment. She sensed that something was wrong.

" Would you like to see them?" she asked.

She was sweet and subdued. Who knows?—there may have been in her heart the same feeling that the Prophet Daniel may have known in his den of lions. In any case, the immediate danger was past. The crisis was over. The Jersey Lil herself was aware of this. She was no longer mistress of the situation.

Quick work it required to put anything over on Bull in a physical way. She knew. And now, from the tail of her eye, she could see that rocking, squirming motion of Bull's heavy shoulders—unmistakable hint that his sensibilities had been touched; also, that he was apt to soothe his hurt with a punch.

" ' Let us crown ourselves with rose-buds,' " read the Jersey Lil, who hadn't left school until she was fourteen.

" I'll crown you wit' this," the Bull stuck in softly, presenting a big fist.

"I'm sincere, sweety," Lil chided him. "Let me read it. Honest, I didn't know you was a bookworm." She could handle men. "'Let us crown ourselves with rosebuds,'" she now read, with literary distinction, "'before they be withered.'" Without pausing—without giving Bull a chance to butt in, that is, she turned smoothly with sour sweetness to Clarice, and demanded: "Who wrote that, deary—did you?"

Clarice had just begun to color again under the assault of the woman's eyes—such eyes as she had never seen in man or woman; so brilliant, so lurking. Then Clarice had uttered a little cry—it was a cry of delight.

Dr. Amos Godie was standing in the door.

Could it have been her dear old uncle who had given her that short, sharp, shrill whistle? She had seen him put his fingers to his bearded lips. It was a peculiar whistle. It was not very loud, yet it had sounded keen, unmistakable, through all the rumble of the Bowery. It was a sound that had unmistakably startled both Bull Tucker and the Jersey Lil.

Clarice noticed all this, but only fleetingly—something to be as fleetingly forgotten. She was so glad to see the dear old gentleman—"all that she had of kith or kin," as he himself always said—that she could have swooned in his arms.

"Oh, uncle darling," she had whispered, "I'm so glad to see you!" She had seized both of his hands, bent closer toward him. "There are a couple of customers here I don't quite understand."

Skyblue tweaked her ear, beamed down at her. But he was all dignity and benevolence as he raised his face and looked at those customers to whom Clarice had referred.

"Excuse me," he said; "I thought my niece was alone." He advanced as toward strangers, then paused, now looking at Bull Tucker. "Ain't you—" he began, but broke off. "Why, bless my eyes, of course you are! You're Martha Tucker's boy, who used to do chores for me when I had that church in Paterson."

"Yes, sir," Bull admitted. He knew now that he'd been playing with dynamite. Nothing less could have led the bishop to have sounded that ancient danger signal of the underworld.

Other things may have passed between Bull and the bishop as the elder now, with fond cordiality, put out his hand. It was a hand, Bull may have reflected, that had "done things" to better men than himself before he, Bull, had ever been born.

Skyblue now turned to the Jersey Lil, to whom he had fed gumdrops when she was a grimy babe in Cherry Street.

"I don't quite place you," he began gently.

But she also was wise. "Mr. Tucker told me you wanted a clerk," she said; "but as I see that the position is already occupied, why, I guess I'll be going."

"Hold on," said the bishop. "You look like an honest girl. What did you say your name was?"

"Lily Smith," she answered. "I've got good references."

"Well, well," said the good old man, rubbing his hands; "you come into my office, both of you, and I'll see what I can do fer you."

They were just starting for the back room—once so familiar to all of them and destined to become so again—when they were brought about by a cheery hail from the street door.

It was Doc. He had been there all the time. It was he, in fact, who had seen Skyblue approaching the shop and given him the tip to hurry. The Doc had recognized at the first glance the damsel he had admired that day when he was beating it from his dental offices, leaving—as he had then believed—the bishop and this girl to their fate.

Doc had become an ardent believer in Skyblue's luck. Like any gambler, he was willing to ride Good Luck, whosesoever it was. He sort of felt that he was being left out of the party now, as he saw Skyblue, Bull, and the Jersey Lil starting for the back room.

"I was just sort of strolling past," he announced in loud, clear tones.

"Why, doctor!" cried Skyblue, rushing toward Doc as toward one who has not been

seen for many months. And Skyblue slung to Clarice. "How's this!" he chuckled. "Remember, pet, all I was tellin' you about Dr. Ricky?" It was a name that Doc himself had once used on a failing commercial venture in soothing syrups—the kind that grandfather would steal because of its alcoholic contents—the snag, by the way, that shipwrecked Doc. "Why, yes, you do, pet," Skyblue was saying. "You remember that scientific friend who had his laboratory over there—him I used to trust with all my mail?"

"Oh, yes," smiled Clarice, genuinely pleased.

"Ricky," said the bishop heartily, "shake hands with my niece, Clarice. Yes, she's the one I used to tell you so much about."

"Pleased to meet you," said the eminent Dr. Ricky.

He looked the part. Both dentists and gamblers lean to neatness. And besides, Doc had dolled himself up especially today, having hoped to make a killing with the Jersey Lil.

It was this small coterie to which Clarice Beldon, out of some impulse of her pure young heart, began serving tea in that back room where all of them, to some extent, had once indulged in the strong waters of the Commodore.

"She's a saint," the bishop would murmur, pouring a modicum of good old Bacardi into his tea during Clarice's absence.

"My Gawd, when I first see her," says Lil, "I thought she was goofy or something."

That "something" to which the present Lily Smith referred stuck, somehow, in that lady's mind—gave her something to dream about, gave her hints of dreams and visions that had rather escaped her mind since she herself was young and innocent.

"But how about those policy gigs in your new Dream Book, unk?" asked Doc. "What does she think they are?" And he read from Skyblue's manuscript: "'Nigger chopping wood. Great good fortune awaits you. Play 6-11-36.'"

"Them," Skyblue replied, stroking his benignant beard. "She thinks them gigs is references to Bible quotations."

And the coterie was growing. "Ham And," "Lefty Levi," "Slim Jim Thorpe," Germaine and Fifi Paris—"the French twins"—Myrtle Weber, now claiming to be married to a rich bookmaker and living on Riverside Drive.

And Milly Walker—"Milwaukee" to the set when Clarice was absent—also was there that day; that day when, quite unexpectedly, the Big Wind, otherwise C. Welliver Whipple, dropped in to see how things were getting along.

CHAPTER XIV.

"VARIETY IS THE SPICE—"

FOR some time now—ever since he had first seen her, in fact—C. Welliver Whipple had been letting his mind and heart dwell on Clarice more than was good for him. There were long spells when he felt lonely, felt that he was getting old, felt that the world hadn't been so good to him after all.

To be sure, he was rich, lived in a big house on Fifth Avenue, had sedulously gone after everything he wanted, and got it. It made no difference to him where the money came from—dirty tenements, enterprises outside the law having to do with those ancient occupations grouped under the heading of "wine, woman, and song."

Wiener himself was authority for the statement that it was C. Welliver, no less, who financed the trust of professional bondsmen in the lesser criminal courts; that he also was the "bank" for most of the small gamblers.

"He's rich," said Wiener, with an emotional depth.

Also powerful; and Wiener would tell anecdotes of how the great ones in Washington itself went pale and shivered if C. W.'s displeasure was aroused.

Which may have been true to some extent, according to the motto that "There is no smoke without some fire."

But C. Welliver, conscious of some great, dark void in his life, had begun to dream

of filling this void with Clarice Beldon. To him she was more than a mere girl. Mere girls meant nothing to him—less than nothing—filled him with contempt—cheap as dirt. But now, with Clarice, he was wont to reflect, it was different. She was the symbol of something—something he had never had—symbol of a long felt want.

There was an alluring mystery about her. It was that religious element. She believed that everybody was good. She believed that the universe was ruled by love. He had even guessed, from certain hints she had dropped—unconsciously, he was almost sure—that she still said her prayers—" like a kid or some dotty old woman." Funny! Unheard-of in a girl with the looks! Yep; something mysterious!

And whenever he stopped to think about it, there were his own hints—broad enough and intentional enough—hints of what he could do for her; apartment of her own, swell furniture, nifty little car, credit accounts on the Avenue. He had seen girls go pop-eyed at a prospect of less. But had Clarice shown a response?

Well, yes, she had; but not the sort of response he was looking for. She had talked about gratitude, but it had been gratitude for this and that " opportunity to serve," " to help darling old uncle in his work."

Sometimes this got on C. Welliver's nerves, and sometimes he believed that the girl was simply lying to him—trying to hook him for something more than he had promised her as yet. And this would make him rage, set him to scheming as to how he could trap her, planning what he'd do to her " when he got around to it." And then, more likely than not, he would draw from the locked drawer of his desk that photograph Skyblue had accidentally forgotten and left with him—the photograph of Clarice in her little white graduation dress.

Whereupon, once more that crawling sense of mystery—of something ghostly back of this delicate and beautiful thing of flesh—would set him to yearning and longing again, to thinking how well she could fill the one and only void remaining in his highly successful and satisfactory life.

It was Clarice herself who had rushed to meet him on his arrival at Ye Sunshine Shoppe. If there was anything put on in her pleasure at seeing him she must have been a consummate actress. C. Welliver Whipple admitted as much to himself as he looked down at her. He had just left the Bowery, the precincts of Chatham Square. That was the world he understood—cops, down-and-outs, Chinks.

C. Welliver read some of the more obvious mottoes hanging about while he made the thrill last of holding her hand—absent-mindedly:

" Be good, and you'll be happy."

" The Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice."

" Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

" I'm so glad you're here," Clarice was saying. " I was just about to serve tea to our sales force, and uncle's giving them a talk." She had an inspiration. " Oh, how they'd prize it if they could have a few words from you!"

" Sales force!" exclaimed Mr. Whipple. " We must be branching out."

Clarice's eyes were wonderfully responsive as she detained him, then whispered: " They're such dear, good souls!"

" Now, God bless us, Brother Whipple!" cried Skyblue, timing his welcome.

He had " made " the distinguished caller the moment the latter had entered the door; but the intervening seconds had been valuable. The Dream Book was out of sight. Most of the members of the sales force had hastily grabbed mottoes of sorts. Wiener was looking curiously at a volume he discovered to bear the title, " Daily Strength for Daily Needs "—thought it was an athletic manual and was looking for the illustrations.

Mr. Whipple, his hand securely held in that of Skyblue, had paused just inside the door of the back room.

" I am afraid," he said, " that my presence is most inopportune. Do not let me interrupt the proceedings."

Skyblue was a little flustered. Milwaukee had been unable to make her get-away. There she was, seated in a corner of the room.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

South of the Cimarron

By EARL C. McCAIN

MAJOR GORDON PORTER, riding at the head of a detachment of negro cavalry, realized that he had a big job before him as he reached the crest of a hill that overlooked the little town of Spaulding. On a quarter mile strip of land that lay between the town and the sluggish Cimarron river to the south, stretched a great Indian encampment, the dull skin tepees basking in the noonday heat. From the number of lodges in the village it seemed that all the Indian nations had gathered there.

The land in that strip belonged to the Comanches, so the Indians had been entirely within their rights in setting up their lodges just outside the town. But several clashes had resulted between the white people and their semi-savage neighbors, causing the citizens of Spaulding to fear an armed attack. Major Porter had been sent to move the Indians back across the Cimarron, but with his command outnumbered ten to one he saw little chance of accomplishing his mission peacefully.

Spaulding was one of those little towns that suddenly spring up during an oil boom. It was located almost on the boundary of the reservation. The oil wells that made possible its existence lay several miles to the north, although a test well sunk between the town and the river had shown no oil there.

The major led his soldiers through the town to an open space that separated it from the Indian village. Leaving Captain Brooks to supervise the arrangement of a camp when the slow-moving supply wagons should arrive, he called a short-legged, broad-chested negro who answered to the name of Miller to act as his orderly and rode toward the Indian encampment.

Hard-faced and rigid in discipline, the major was a stern figure in the saddle or when he sat in his tent at troop headquarters. Yet closer inspection would have shown a hint of sympathy and keen understanding in his brown eyes. And he knew his dusky troopers as few white officers ever come to know them.

Excitable, boastful and careless in small matters, the negro soldier is sometimes con-

sidered hard to handle by white officers who do not understand his nature. But no man in the army takes a greater pride in his work and personal appearance, and the major knew that in a crisis those "boys" of his could be depended upon to face danger with courage equal to that of any white soldier.

In his selection of Miller as an orderly, the major had merely followed habit. Quick to understand and act, Miller made a good servant, and with that quality, he had a carefree, cheerful nature that the officer liked. Miller was the fastest negro runner in the U. S. army, a quality that had won him the nickname of "Mercury."

This was Miller's first experience in meeting Indians, and the major glanced at him from the corner of his eye as they were surrounded by squaws, children and snarling dogs. But if Miller felt any fear, he knew how to hide it, and his manner was almost as dignified as that of the officer.

Major Porter had dealt with the Comanches before, and he knew old Iron Nose, the head war-chief. The different shapes of the lodges and the colors of the headdresses told him that half a dozen tribes were represented in the village. Unerringly, he made his way to the tepee of the chief. Handing the reins of his horse to Miller, he stepped forward to meet the withered old Indian who sat before his lodge.

"Iron Nose is a great chief. I hope his people have much to eat and many ponies," the major said in greeting, slapping the dust from his clothing with his gantlets.

"How," the Indian grunted, then asked: "Why does the white chief of the black soldiers come to the Cimarron?"

"He wants to know why all the young men of the tribes have gathered at the village of Iron Nose? The white chief has seen the lodges of the Pawnees, the Arapahoes, the Pottawatomies and the Kiowas, when he expected to find only the Comanches."

"The white chief has forgotten that this is the time for the contests and games. The tribes have gathered to try the speed of their ponies and runners against the Comanches."

The major *had* forgotten that, and he nodded with understanding. He knew that such meets were held in some village each year, and that they were gala events for all the Indians within traveling distance. But he had come there on business, and he touched upon it by saying:

"The great White Father has heard of trouble between the Comanches and the white people of the town. Does Iron Nose know anything of this?"

"Iron Nose knows of it, and he knows the white people are to blame. They have built their town beside the reservation and dug their holes for oil on the Indians' land. When my people crossed the river and stretched their lodges near the town the white men tried to drive them away."

Again the major nodded thoughtfully. He knew the practise carried out wherever the interests of the white men conflicted with those of the Indians. And he knew that usually the white man won, regardless of the rights in the case. Still, it was his business to obey orders, not to weigh issues. Therefore he said:

"The white chief knows that Iron Nose speaks the truth, but he must do as he is ordered. He has been sent to tell Iron Nose that he must move his village south of the Cimarron, and give this strip of land to the white people. This is the word of the great White Father at Washington, which the white chief must obey."

For several minutes Iron Nose remained silent. There was no change of expression in his seamed old face to indicate his feelings, yet the major knew that behind those inscrutable features a battle was being fought. The wrongs of a down-trodden race—once masters of the entire country—were being weighed and a course of action considered. At last the old chief spoke.

"The great White Father gave this land to the Comanches, and his soldiers marked its boundaries. Iron Nose told the chief of the soldiers that he would keep his people inside the boundaries and teach them to live in peace. Iron Nose has kept his word."

The major had expected that, and he waited a moment before making a reply.

"It is true that Iron Nose has never broken his word, and it is true that this land

was given to the Indians. But Iron Nose is wise as well as brave, and he knows that his people must live in peace with the white men. Does not Iron Nose know that it is better for his people if they move south of the Cimarron?"

"The white chief speaks words of wisdom, but Iron Nose cannot answer for his people now. They are bitter at the white man, and often at the council fires they speak of war. They are many—more than the black soldiers of the white chief and the white men of the town—and they have many friends among the Indian nations. There is nothing more Iron Nose can say."

Major Porter knew that it was best to let the matter rest there for the present. He presented the old chief with a cigar and swung to the saddle.

As he and Miller rode away from the lodge they heard shouts behind them and glanced back. Two Indian ponies were racing through the village, neck and neck as they swept past. The riders, almost naked, and riding with only surcingles and horsehair cords about the lower jaws of their ponies, made a fine picture of primitive sport.

"That's sho' some race, majah!" Miller exclaimed, watching the racers until they reached the finish line.

Miller rode one of the best horses in the detachment, a great roan charger, and the horse, like his rider, had caught the excitement of the race.

II.

BACK at his command, the major talked a few minutes with Captain Brooks, then set out for the nearest telegraph station. A few miles out of Spaulding he met the supply wagons and responded to the salutes of the drivers. It was late afternoon when he reached the town of Montauk, to which point the troops had come by train. He at once sent a telegram to the commanding officer at Fort Hall, advising him of the real situation at Spaulding.

By the time the major had eaten supper he had a reply from his superior officer, telling him that two troops of cavalry would entrain for Montauk the next morning, and instructing him to keep peace until the reenforcements arrived. The major knew that would require at least several days.

Upon his return to Spaulding the major found that the camp had been set up and sentries posted. He turned his horse over to Miller and retired, satisfied that with the arrival of additional troops the Indians could be handled, even though they were almost certain to put up a fight.

By the following day the contests of the Indians were in full swing. From the door of his tent, facing the Cimarron, the major watched wiry little Indian ponies in half a dozen thrilling races. When the foot races began he got out his field glasses in order to watch better the runners as they darted from the village, circled a lone tree that stood some distance up the river, and then raced back to the starting point.

Late that afternoon the major noticed Miller passing the orderly tent with several bright-colored Indian blankets across his arm. Upon being stopped the negro explained.

"We all bin racin' them Indians, majah, and Ah won these things bettin'. The Indians ain't got much money, but they'll bet anything they got."

The major asked a few more questions, then permitted the trooper to go his way. He knew that the negro soldiers usually got along well with the Indians, probably because of a willingness to meet on equal terms and a mutual fondness for betting. He felt that until the time came to move the Indians there was little likelihood of trouble, so he decided to let his troopers share in the fun of the contests as long as possible.

Shortly after mess the major was seated at his camp table, busy with a commissary report, when a figure darkened the door. The officer glanced up to face a tall, stately Indian who wore the headdress and robe of a Comanche, but had the unmistakable air of a white man. In perfect English, the visitor said:

"You are the commanding officer, I presume?"

"Yes."

"I am Rushing Wind, a Carlisle student. Chief Iron Nose is my father. I came to see you about my people, if I may."

"Certainly. Come in," the major invited, motioning to a camp chair which the Indian accepted with ease. There followed a short silence, broken by the Indian.

"I arrived at my father's village this morning and learned of the trouble concerning the land. I have been educated by the government in order that I might better serve my people. If possible, I want to help you adjust matters peaceably."

"I doubt if there is anything we can do." the officer replied, anxious to show his appreciation of the offer. "I talked to your father yesterday and he says the Indians are determined to hold the land. I have orders to move them back across the Cimarron, but have wired for reinforcements before taking any action. I want to avoid any trouble if possible."

"I, too, have talked with my father. He is willing to give up the land, but my people are not. And they have the support of the other tribes gathered here for the annual games. I realize that it will be better for my people to move beyond the river, which forms a natural boundary that is not always so easily crossed. But it is hard to make them see that."

"The only persons who can make them see that are men like yourself, who realize what is best for the Indians in the long run," the major replied. "You may be assured of my fullest support in anything you can do to solve the difficulty."

Rushing Wind thanked the officer for the promise as he arose. He talked a few minutes longer about the contests which he had come to take part in, then stepped from the tent. Major Porter, standing in the doorway, watched him swing lightly to the back of a great black horse and gallop off toward the village.

The visit pleased the major. It showed the good coming from the efforts of the government to educate the younger Indians, and it meant that as more and more such young men as Rushing Wind spread their influence the Indians would gradually become part of the white man's civilization, instead of spending dissatisfied lives on the reservations. He kept thinking of that until he fell asleep that night.

There was considerable excitement in the camp the next morning, due to the fact that the troopers were keenly interested in the contests. By afternoon most of the soldiers were at the Indian village, many taking part in the affair.

Usually the troopers lost, because it is hard to beat an Indian at his native sports. But there was one exception, Mercury Miller was upholding his reputation in every contest he entered. When the short-legged trooper returned to camp that night with an armload of trophies he grinned at the major and said:

"Ah'm sho' goin' good, majah! Ah've won every race Ah've bin in. Ah'm all set to meet their champeen to-morrow; a fellow they call Rushing Wind."

"Rushing Wind!" and the major suddenly recalled the name of his visitor. "Is he much of a runner?"

"He sho' is, majah. He's a Carlisle man, with a great track record. He's run away from all the other Indians, and Ah'm to meet him in a big match race to-morrow. The boys are sho' gonna win some jack on me."

"Well, better not bet too much. Carlisle turns out some mighty fine athletes," the officer cautioned. "I have an idea that Rushing Wind can run pretty fast."

"That won't help him none when he meets me, majah. Ah'm gonna' show him how to fly," and with another grin Miller saluted and hurried toward his tent.

III.

THE contests were to end with the match race between the Indian champion and the black soldier, and it was clear to the major that the day was to be one of interest when he stepped from his tent the next morning. The Indian encampment was already astir, while the troopers were hurrying through the work of caring for their horses in order to get away as quickly as possible.

The final horse races were held during the forenoon, but the soldiers took no part in these because the cavalry horses, as a rule, outclassed the Indian ponies. In the afternoon came the wrestling contests and matches with bows and arrows. As the time for the big race drew near the major and

Captain Brooks rode to the village to watch the contest.

Miller was the first contestant to appear, dressed only in running trunks and track shoes. Even at that distance the major could read the grin of confidence on the negro's face as he stood talking with several soldier companions.

When Rushing Wind, in loin-cloth and moccasins, stepped from a lodge the major gazed at him a moment in silent admiration. The young Comanche looked like a bronze statue, while the muscles rippled back and forth under the coppery skin each time he moved. Noticing him, Captain Brooks said:

"I hope the boys haven't bet all their money, major. Mercury is up against a real race this time."

"That's what I think," the major agreed, then turned as he noticed a number of old Indians walking sedately through the village.

These were the head chiefs of the tribes, and each wore a white buffalo robe about his shoulders. With a dignity befitting their rank they seated themselves in a circle near the point from which the race was to start.

The Indian lacks the executive ability of the white man, and there was some confusion about starting. The race, like the others of the meet, was to be up the river to the lone tree and back to the starting point. A young Kiowa warrior was finally selected as the starter, and as his arm dropped in a signal Rushing Wind and Mercury Miller shot forward.

As the runners passed the two white officers the major saw that Miller was losing no time in getting under way. The trooper's short legs were flashing like the spokes of a fast moving wheel, while the Indian, taking much longer strides, kept a short distance behind him.

The major's sympathies were with Miller, because the negro was one of his "boys," but he really had little hope of seeing him win. Rushing Wind was running with the long, easy stride of the Indian, and the major was certain that in the end he would flash past his antagonist to victory.

The turning point brought no change in position. Miller reached it first, and, with one hand on the trunk, whirled around it and started back ten yards in the lead. As the runners entered the back stretch there was a roar from the spectators, the troopers shouting for Miller while the shrill war-whoops of a half dozen Indian nations encouraged Rushing Wind.

Five hundred yards from the finish line Rushing Wind showed a burst of speed and began to gain. Foot by foot he crept up until it seemed to the major that defeat for the trooper was certain. But Mercury Miller had earned his reputation, and he had the courage to match his speed. As the Indian forged up beside him the negro crouched lower to the ground in a terrific sprint that carried him over the finish line winner by a yard.

A riot of sound came from the negro troopers as the race ended. Campaign hats were thrown into the air, and the wildly shouting troopers pounded one another on the back from pure joy. Miller, almost in a state of collapse from his whirlwind finish, was lifted to the shoulders of his companions and carried through the village.

Everywhere the soldiers were collecting bets, blankets, moccasins, and even Indian ponies passing into their hands. The major called a lanky first sergeant and ordered him to keep a sharp watch for any outbreak of trouble, then rode to the camp.

The Indian celebration was to end in a series of tribal dances and a great feast in the village that night, and the major granted the plea of his men that they be given passes until midnight. Immediately after retreat the troopers began setting out for the village.

The major always rose at reveille. He had just stepped to the door of his tent the next morning when the top sergeant appeared and, saluting stiffly, said: "Sir, I have to report that Private Miller has lost his horse, and the corporal of the guard reports that he didn't reach camp until two o'clock."

The major instructed that Miller report to him after breakfast, as something else drew his attention. The entire Indian village had disappeared, except for several dozen lodges that had been set up on the south bank of the river.

He was wondering at that when he noticed Rushing Wind riding toward his tent, leading Miller's roan charger. As the Indian halted the major asked: "What are you doing with that horse, and where are the Indians?"

"I'll answer your last question first," Rushing Wind replied, smiling. "You promised to support me in anything I could do to get my people across the Cimarron peaceably. I arranged that match race yesterday with the understanding that if I lost my people would give up the strip of land. I had to tell my father and the others that you had agreed to the plan."

Rushing Wind paused to smile, then went on: "Your soldier, Miller, knew nothing of the plan, and last night he was so pleased at his victory that he challenged me to a race for my horse. We held the race down the river, out of sight of my people, and—well, he walked into camp. But I knew the horse belongs to the government, so I've brought him back."

And the major, understanding, reached up to shake the young Comanche's hand.

THE END

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THE SONG OF THE MOOR

OH, the joy of sunny mornings
With the turf beneath my feet,
Where the moor is unpolluted
By the canker of the street;
Where the budding heather harkens
To the music of the snail
In its painful, mute endeavor
On an inching, aimless trail!

I would walk in soft precision;
I would run in eagerness;
I would greet the winds that flutter
With a fervid friendliness!
For how trivial are failures
And their picayunish woes
When the blood is pounding gayly
With a surge that fairly glows!

Far away from city hutches,
Where the tangy air can give
Grasp of life to lagging purpose
That has seemed too tired to live,
There the moor is always waiting
With a wholesome spaciousness
And a welcome that is mantled
In a listening graciousness!

There is beauty for the seeing;
There is youth to claim awhile;
There is rest and inspiration
With a dancing, windy smile!
I would have you come and see it!
I would have you know it, too,
For it seems to be awaiting,
And perhaps it waits for you!

Sonia Ruthèle Novák.

What is the Cost?

By KENNETH PERKINS

Author of "The Earth Shaker," "It Is Written," etc.

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

A CERTAIN Englishman came to the dispensary of one Vatham Singh, who was reputed to be the trickiest and most murderous Hindu in the Madras Presidency. It was before the breaking of the monsoon, and even the scorpions stayed in the crannies of the walls because of the heat.

Now, this Englishman, whose name and dignities and degrees may be found in many public places, was known to the natives as Merton Sahib, and they accounted him a just man. Yes, even I myself am of the same opinion, despite the fact that he went to the dispensary on that day to obtain poison with which to take the life of one of his enemies.

Before arriving at this opinion, however, I found it necessary to study the case thoroughly, to give all motives their due, and all circumstances their consideration. Merton Sahib, let me repeat, was a just man, a man of great moral stamina, a man who deserved his station and his dignities.

But there is a saying in India which as I remember can be translated something like this:

"A stone is hollowed out by the crawling of ants."

That, in a word, is what happened to Merton Sahib. He was a big man in stature as well as in moral courage. Courageous was his mouth, his gray eyes, his finely chiseled chin. A black mustache and jet black eyebrows contrasted with his white skin. His skin, of course, was pallid; I cannot deny that. There is that tropical, almost jaundiced, cast over the complexion of any Englishman down there in the southern part of India. But despite the ravages of the moist climate, then the with-

ering dryness of the months before the breaking of the monsoon, the heat, the curry and rice, the arrack, the quinine, Merton Sahib gave you the impression of virile power.

And now look at him!

He comes under cover of night to a native drug shop. He leaves his horse with a groom out there under a tamarind tree far down the road, so that no man will know to just which shop or bazaar he has come.

He enters the place. Rather an unsavory destination for so handsome a dignitary in his well laundered whites, his freshly pipe-clayed helmet and shoes, his teakwood cane with gold dog's head. The smoky lamp—a wick in a half shell of coconut—could scarcely do that figure justice.

Vatham Singh, doctor babu, got up and salaamed. Vatham was a small, fat, bamboo-colored gentleman with brass-rimmed spectacles, a caste mark of sindur on his bland forehead, a silk cap on his oily head.

" Master, lord, sahib, son of the sun," and numerous other such salutations were breathed fervently from the surprised and voluptuous lips of the babu.

The face of Merton Sahib, stern, pale and handsome, did not respond. His jet eyebrows knitted. He wiped his parchment-like forehead, even though there was not the comfort of moisture there.

After speaking for awhile of this and that, the Englishman said:

" I have heard on good authority that you are one Hindu in a million who can bridle his tongue."

The babu looked over the rims of his spectacles. He was an innocent and genial appearing man—not the sort Merton had expected to find.

" Is your visit so serious a matter, then, sahib?" he asked.

" It is a confidence—a matter of life and death. And I am going to trust you—"

Vatham Singh seemed alarmed. A confidence is like a bag of rupees under your pillow when there are thieves in the serai. The babu, who was a clever man as well as an educated one, rubbed his fat hands in trepidation. He expected the statement, even before the Englishman made it.

Merton Sahib brushed away the flying ants and moths that were torturing him. He stood up, bent low so that his pale, worn face was close to that of the Hindu. Then he whispered tensely, as if he had been a dumb man and had forced himself to speak:

" I want you to kill a man—an enemy against whom I bear a grudge. Poison—anything—you can do it. It must be slow. It must never be discovered. No, don't shrink away. Stop that infernal fidgeting with your hands. There, I've told you—and there's no refusal possible now."

" Sahib, I have not refused."

Merton started as if taken aback by this passive statement. Passive as it was, it was a statement of murder. The white man interlaced his slender fingers; for a moment he wrung them, and then sank back into the chair. He had the feeling of having accomplished something irrevocable. The deed was already done.

He looked up then, actually as if hoping that the babu did not mean what he had said. But there he was, standing serenely above him, his fat, bamboo-colored face immobile but expressive.

Finally: " The poison, sahib—for whom shall I mix it?"

Merton put out his hand to stay him. " Wait."

The doctor babu slipped his spectacles up on his bland, yellow forehead. His eyes, untrammeled now by the thick glasses, beamed large, bovine, inscrutable. " Is there some doubt, sahib?"

" None, by Heaven! The poison is for the deputy commissioner—at Ramgad."

The babu smiled. " How fortunate. A member of my caste is his chuprassy. What you have commanded is easily accomplished. Nay, if it were the most difficult task in the whole world, I would accomplish it—for the sake of establishing a friendship."

The Englishman made the same gesture with his hands that he made against the flying ants.

" For God's sake, not that!"

The babu nodded. " Murder? What is

murder? It is merely a hastening of what you white men call death. And death? A transmigration of the soul. I sometimes prefer to call it a liberation. That, sahib, is nothing for us to think about. But the means—"

Merton stared anxiously. Yes, the means—that was the question of the moment. What did Merton Sahib care about the vagaries of Hindu philosophy? *The means*—that was the immediate concern.

The babu smiled—a smile revealing white teeth. He was a civilized babu, who avoided the chewing of betel nut. His smile was very engaging.

"The means, after all—on a moment's thought—seem quite simple. I have a powder which is both colorless and tasteless. A pinch of it in the food of your enemy, placed there periodically by my caste brother, his chuprassy, and the man will pass slowly into his new incarnation. A pinch each morning in his chota hazri, another in his tea at tiffin. He will wither as if—not by poison—but by the breath of the monsoon. Quite simple—and an interesting experiment."

Merton Sahib, who, as I cannot help repeating, was a man of moral courage when in his right mind—flinched at the equanimity of the doctor babu. Simple! An interesting experiment! A man withering away as if breathed upon by the monsoon.

Well, at any rate, it was not to be a sudden death. That at least was a slight cause for comfort. Merton Sahib could take a little leave, a trip to England and back—and it would all be over.

He looked across at the babu, who was now pounding something in a mortar with pestle.

The agreement seemed to be consummated. The process was already under way. But Merton Sahib—perhaps because subconsciously he was still groping for a hindrance—put out his hand and said: "Wait."

The soft grinding ceased, leaving no sound in the stuffy little shop, save only the hum of the winged ants and a distant, steady thrumming in the heart of the city, where tom-toms were warning the predatory gods.

Then Merton Sahib said in a very businesslike voice: "This will involve a small amount of expense and perhaps a lot of trouble for you. And there is, of course, a risk. I shall not ask you to do this for nothing." He cleared his throat and asked: "What will be the cost?"

The doctor babu looked up. He brought the brass-rimmed spectacles to his eyes, magnifying the pupils and distorting one eye against which the lens was thickest.

"I do not understand what you mean?" he said.

Merton was surprised at the earnestness of his tone. He laughed harshly. "You're a queer card—saying a thing like that. You know bally well what I mean. You're after your dasturi as well as any other dresser in your business. Or for that matter, any other Hindu in Madras. I dare say you would do me a favor—but not a favor of this sort. Come now. This business of—of slowly withering a man up, as you say—what is the price?"

The babu scratched his head in honest perplexity. "The price? The price you will have to pay for ordering this man killed?"

His owl's eyes looked about the chunammed walls, at the floor, at the bottles, at the dark roof, at a lizard scurrying into the eaves.

"Sahib," he said finally, "that is something that I cannot immediately reckon."

"No, I suppose not. You're afraid I'll balk at what you dare to suggest. Well, I won't. I'm prepared to pay."

"You are prepared to pay—whatever the price is?"

Merton Sahib squirmed. "Well, dash it all, I don't mean by that, that you can extort a crore of rupees out of me—"

"Wait, sahib—the payment shall not be in money."

Merton stared. The heat pressed upon him, smothering his next outburst: "Confound you for a—"

"It is not a good place to discuss this transaction. I cannot estimate the cost at the present moment. I must debate with myself. And you must have time to think."

"It's got to be settled to-night," the other growled.

"Well and good. Why not retire to my house in the rear of this compound? There is a punkah which will cool you. We shall have arrac, mangoes, dhal. You are fatigued—and you cannot fight this heat by fasting."

"Confound it all—take me out of this room! I'm suffocating! I'm going mad!"

"When you are refreshed, then I shall nominate the price."

II.

VATHAM SINGH had prospered in a measure. In the compound at the rear of his shop was his house, a thatched bungalow with a veranda well shaded by palmyras and tamarinds, with dallan of ample size in which to receive guests, and an apartment in which to keep the few women of his household. Inasmuch as the respectability of a man is measured according to his ability to keep his women secluded, Vatham Singh was to be considered a credit to his caste and to the municipality.

His boast that it was cooler in the dallan was not entirely vain. Although to the Englishman it was scarcely better than moving from the frying pan into the fire. True enough, a punkah flapped overhead, squeaking mournfully, weaving the smoke of the vegetable oil lamps back and forth like the shuttle of a loom. Merton Sahib fell prostrate upon a rattan chair.

He began to feel the heat in his brain, as if he were withering up. He thought of how his enemy was to wither thus, by poison. A grim smile came to his mouth—and he was able to sip the drink in the brass goblet proffered him.

He lay there in a stupor, brooding, tortured, becoming a part of the household of Vatham Singh. Born in India, he reacted to its life. He was absorbed in it to-night. He was an Englishman who could think in native terms. For a moment he was a Hindu in his passive attitude toward fate.

Vatham Singh was rummaging in an ant-eaten chest among ink bottles, rulers, discarded prescriptions, and Tamil books, for a certain document.

"The price for taking a man's life," he was saying. "What a riddle!"

He extracted a sheaf of papyrus, blew away the dust, and wiped the ants from it. "And yet, sahib," he went on, "it has occurred to me—miraculously enough—that I have the answer written upon these papyrus leaves which I hold in my hand."

Merton Sahib looked up, awakened with a jolt from his stupor.

"The price!" he repeated. "You say you have it written down there! Dash it all, don't truck with me! I'm in no mood, you know! If you don't look out I'll run amuck with this heat. Another drink. The price? Yes, read what you have there."

"As I understand," Vatham Singh murmured, "it is I who am to commit this murder. But as for the guilt—"

Merton Sahib tried to laugh. "If you're squiffy about that, I can satisfy you. The guilt is not on your soul. You are doing this thing as a mere matter of trade. It is a business transaction. As for the moral considerations involved, well"—he got it out with difficulty—"confound it all, the fellow's blood is on my own hands."

The Hindu turned about sharply—not in surprise. It seemed that he already understood this part of the transaction. He nodded agreeably.

"Inasmuch as that point is clear," he said, "then I have no doubt but that we can come to some agreement concerning the cost."

He spread out the papyrus leaves, which were in long strips attached at one end by a bit of fiber, so that the document took on the shape of a fan.

"I have here a very strange chronicle," he went on. "A certain mahatma of great learning, at whose feet I myself sat as a disciple some years ago, gave me this sheaf of papyrus. He warned me, inasmuch as I was to become a dealer in drugs, that men would come to me asking for poison wherewith to take the life of some enemy or other. He told me to read this chronicle to them upon such an occasion."

He adjusted his spectacles. "Even so. But I had not dreamed that a man so revered and honored as you would come to me. And yet here you are!"

"What's it got to do with our transaction?" Merton Sahib asked impatiently.

"Merely—*the cost.*"

The Englishman tried to laugh, but succeeded only in gasping. "Go on," he said finally; "I want to hear it."

"It is a history of an Englishman who, in many respects, might be likened to you. Save only that he was evil, whereas you are a just man. It is a short episode, told tersely, giving merely the bare objective truths. A horrible episode, and yet one that is as beautiful as it is bloody. It tells of the price this Englishman—an I. C. S. wallah of high official standing—paid for the murder of an enemy."

Merton Sahib leaned forward on the teakwood table upon which the sheaf was spread. The babu peered intently at the characters cut into the dry leaves, as if about to translate a very difficult piece of script.

"It's in Telegu," he said. "But I will translate."

And thus he began.

The First Leaf of Papyrus.

In the thirteenth year of the reign of the Maharaja Subha Dhinn, who was king over twenty and seven provinces, there lived in his capital city a certain Englishman.

And his name was Shrake Sahib, an educated man who came to the Madras Presidency and wasted his substance in riotous living. And, look you, he toiled not, neither did he spin. But he became an eater of hashish. And he smoked bangh. And he bought two nautch girls with what money he still had left of his apportionment, and lived in the Mohammedan section of Pangar.

Then it came to pass that Shrake Sahib was without money or price. And his nautch girls no longer found favor in his sight, so that he left them and went into the hills.

And there, so it is said in dram shops and serais where his name is still known, he hired himself for a season to a tea-planter. But when he had a handful of rupees he took a Tamil Hill girl to wife, and went to Pangar, where he lived for a space even as a herder might live who owns naught in this world save a buffalo, a wife, and a mutti hut.

And no man knew Shrake Sahib as an Englishman; for lo, his face was yellowed with drugs, and he wore a fez, even as the Mohammedans. And he was despised by all castes.

Yes, he was a pariah, and in nowise a sahib.

Then it came to pass, according to hearsay—which I have reason to believe is reputable—that this pariah Shrake arose and said to himself:

"Wherefore have I become as a pariah? I have not solved the riddle of my existence in this world. I am like a husk—like the coconut when the milk and meat are gone. I must arise and go in search of another soul. For my body is like a carcass from which the soul is departed, except that I still live. Yes, I am like a body set upon a Parsee tower for the vultures to eat. And yet even the vultures forbear to touch me."

And he said further.

"I will arise and search out a swami who lives in this city, and who is reputed to be a great mahatma in the lore of the Hindus. And I will say to him: 'Here, O swami, I have a soul which I propose to barter for another. For this present soul of mine is of no use. It is, in fact, as if I were without one altogether. And indeed I would be better off far if I were without one—for then I would be dead. But now I am among the living, and yet I am little better than a carcass on a Parsee tower.'"

He immediately bent himself to carry out this plan of his. And to that end he sold his hill girl, who according to reports was a very comely woman with eyes like a doe's and hair that was like the black shadow of night on the hills of Palmgoor.

And it is said that because of her beauty he sold her at a considerable profit over what he had originally paid for her. And with the bag of rupees thus acquired, he considered himself as having made a very good start upon the search for a soul.

So it came to pass that he gathered what remained of his effects, which were no more than the bag of rupees and the clothes upon his back, his ragged fez, which was no longer red, but faded to brown, and likewise a tat-pony upon which he rode.

Thus he arrived at the house of the mahatma and sage, Daj Doraj, than whom there is none wiser between the Himalayas and Tuticorin.

And he said to the mahatma:

"O swami, behold me, a man without honor among all castes, a man whose shadow is a pollution, a man whose carcass even the birds of the air forbear to consume. I am as one dead, for the soul in my body is shriveled, like the rice fields before the monsoon. How can I lift up my head again to face my brethren? How can I restore my soul?"

Then said the swami, stroking his long white beard: "Do you believe in my teachings? Do you believe that the soul of a man in leaving his body may haply transmigrate into the body of, let us say, a cobra?"

And the miserable Englishman said that he believed. For indeed he had lived so long among the natives that their ways were his ways, and their gods his gods.

So the swami said: "Do you believe that your own soul may leave your body—a process which you Englishmen call death?"

And the Englishman answered: "Even so. But I am not dead now. And I do not wish to die. My understanding is that there is no death. There is merely the destruction of this carcass which is the soul's habitation. We all believe that truth, even the Englishmen among whom I lived at first; yes, and the Mohammedans with whom I took up my abode in Madras; and the Hindus whose fields surround my house. There is no dissension in any of these religions on that point. Our souls are immortal—even so hideous a soul as mine."

Then the swami smiled benevolently and, still stroking his beard, gave answer:

"It is well. I will give you of my wisdom, for I know that you are as a well-watered field where rice may be sown. You are not like most Englishmen, a field that is stony and full of thorns."

"What you say I will believe," said the piteous and beggarly Shrake.

"Then hearken to this: Verily I say to you, a soul can leave the body of a man—so once in a great while it has happened—before that man dies."

And Shrake trembled and was sore afraid.

But the swami said furthermore: "His soul may leave his body and migrate into the body of another—perhaps even another human being."

"Do you mean, O swami, that my soul may leave my body—and that I shall still live?" The Englishman trembled, and clasped his hands, and swayed back and forth in his fear. "Even so, O swami, I believe this is what is happening—not swiftly but slowly! Slowly I am becoming a carcass that walks and breathes and has its being—but is as if dead."

"But do not forget this one great truth," said the swami: "When your soul is liberated it will seek another habitation."

"Yes, a monkey—a parrot—a cobra!" the Englishman wailed.

"Or peradventure—a man!" said the swami.

"A man. *A man?*"

Shrake Sahib collected himself so that he wrung his hands no longer—nor did he sweat—nor did he sway back and forth. Instead he was like a stone image as he fixed his stare upon the benign mahatma's countenance. And as he looked, the visage of the Englishman, haggard, sickly, hideous, became as if lighted by a lamp.

"You mean that my soul may go into the body of another man?"

The swami nodded. And after he was certain that the Englishman understood his words, he spoke yet further:

"Give ear likewise to thus truth, O most miserable of creatures: Nothing in the heavens above nor on the earth beneath nor in the waters on the face of the earth is without a soul. Not even a crow, nor a mongoose, nor the snake which the mongoose hunts, nor the smallest white ant burrowing in the leaves of a book—none of these things is without a soul." The venerable silver-haired teacher picked up a mango which, with other fruits, was on a plate at his elbow. "Even this mango is a symbol of some truth. And that truth is its soul. Without it, it will perish, be eaten, and its stone thrown away, and its skin given to swine. But as it exists—here in my hand, green and fresh—it is possessed of a beautiful thing: its soul."

"If that mango perishes, how then can *I* exist after my soul has fled?"

"You will be possessed of another."

"I cannot understand that," said the Englishman in great perplexity.

"Why not? If you believe in transmigration, if you believe that your soul may go into the body of another man—why then cannot the soul of some other man take possession of your body?"

The Englishman scratched his thin hair. His lips weakened and trembled, the light of his countenance went out. He was again hideous in the misery of his ignorance.

"You mean, O swami," he said finally with great torture of spirit, "that my soul may go into another man's body, and his soul come into mine—*while we are yet alive!*"

"Such a thing has come to pass before this," said the swami, not without certitude. "For it is written that once the spirit of a Toda goat herd passed into the body of the Rajah of Combitoor."

But for the first time the Englishman lost his faith in the great swami's teachings and laughed him to scorn, saying: "This is all Hindu rubbish. It is not so written in the religions of civilized people—but only in your Dravidian religions—and believed in by your devil-worshipers. Such is the belief of a Toda—who is no more than a savage."

And the swami was wroth, but he gave a quiet answer: "Can you forget that in the religion of your English countrymen it is taught that '*a man may be born again?*'"

"Yes, but this idea of a rajah—particularly Combitoor himself—becoming a Toda goat herd?"

"Is it not written in your book that King Herod became as a beast of the field and went forth to graze upon grass?"

"I do remember something of that sort," the Englishman said, with a shrug.

"And I have heard travelers say that in the New World beyond England there are tribes of savages whose swamis are called witch doctors. And it is said these witch doctors have—in very rare instances, of course—been known to change themselves successively into a bear, then into a mole, then into a snake."

"Yes, I have heard that, too—in the old days at Oxford when I was a student of such things."

"Then why is it so incredible that a man may change himself into another man? Particularly when it is proclaimed as a truth in all religions from savagery to Christianity, yea even in the true religion which I declare?"

Partially convinced, the renegade Englishman thought for awhile. Then suddenly, as if some inspiration had fired him, he turned his face toward the mahatma.

The venerable sage looked down upon that hideous visage, upon those red, bleared eyes, those betel-blackened teeth, that stained mouth, those drawn parchment cheeks—and a light was reflected upon it again, as if with the beams of a lamp.

"Mahatma!" the Englishman cried. "How can I change myself to another man? Give me a new soul! Let me become some one else!"

"It can be done."

The Englishman, misinterpreting the swami's deliberate attitude, jingled the bag of rupees before him. "Take this, O swami, and give me a greater, a more courageous soul! Let it be—in the manner you have nominated—before death! For I am afraid to die! I want to live. I want to be born again. I want to be another man!"

"If you will barter your soul for another's," said the swami, "how do you know that you will be the better off?"

"There is not much doubt about that!" the Englishman answered. "Whoever swaps his soul for mine is going to get the worst of the bargain!"

The swami smiled—a venerable, indulgent smile which made his deep black eyes glitter. The patness of the Englishman's remark did not escape him. Shrake was no longer a man, but a husk. He was a semblance of a man such as one might put in a rice field upon a stick to frighten away the crows.

"Mahatma," he cried. "Can you—*will* you perform this miracle? Give me another soul!"

"I can perform it. I have in the past changed a man so that he was born again."

Indeed this power was known to belong

to the swami Daj Doraj. It was known that he had cleansed a leper in Madras, and raised a bazaar keeper's son from the dead. And many other miracles of his were noised abroad in the presidency from the Nilgri Hills even as far south as Madura, and eastward to the Bay of Bengal.

Wherefore the Englishman had faith—even though the miracle he prayed for was incredible to all minds save those who have lived as one of the Hindus.

So Shrake Sahib said: "Here is this bag of rupees, O swami. Take it. You are not an ascetic. I have heard you yourself repeat the Hindu saying, that 'a severe ascetic is a great rogue.' Take this money and buy dom mats and tatty curtains, and vessels of brass for your bungalow. And in return, perform this miracle."

The swami bemused himself for a long space of time. The miracle was a difficult one to perform. As for the money, he cared not. But he was at heart a benevolent swami. And it was his desire to do good to the poor in spirit and to heal the sick.

"I would rejoice in lifting you from the miserable estate to which you have fallen," he said to Shrake Sahib. "But I shall pass judgment on no other mortal. It is for you to bring a man to me. Choose the man whose soul you desire in exchange for yours. If he is a good man I shall not perform the miracle. For in that case I would be doing a great wrong. If he is a wicked man—then—peradventure the bargain might be just. And with this bag of rupees I shall buy rice and distribute it among the poor."

"Agreed!" Shrake Sahib cried in great elation. "I shall choose the man. I will find him! I already know the very man whose place in this world I wish to take! I will bring him to you!"

"There are certain rites to perform," the swami said, as if in warning. "It will be necessary for me to give you drugs—so that you both pass into a sleep which will simulate death itself. There must be the passing of a few drops of blood from one's veins into the veins of the other. A spell must be woven."

This gave the Englishman pause. A spell? A sleep to simulate death! And what after all would the end be? He would become another man! What misery might this not entail!

But no! He was resolved. No man could be more miserable than he. No man more detestable. As he had specified to the old swami—he would come out by far the best of the bargain.

"I will do it!" he cried. "By some means or other I will bring the man here. You shall perform your rites. Whatever they be—whether for three days we descend into the fires of hell—or, like Jonah, into the stomach of a great fish! What of it! I am thinking only of—"

"Of the resurrection," the swami said in quiet triumph.

"The resurrection!" the renegade repeated, dragging himself out of the bungalow into the soft hot dust among the palms.

The Second Leaf of Papyrus.

And now it is written how that Shrake Sahib, when he thought of these wondrous things, did arise and say to himself: "I shall choose a man—whose soul is to be exchanged for mine. And I shall choose carefully. For the man who is willing to exchange his soul for mine must be a great man and a courageous one, for—in a manner of speaking—from the moment of the miracle that man will be myself. Therefore I will pick out the man that I want to become!"

And he said further: "I shall not choose a servant, for who wants to be a chuprassy? Nor shall I choose a tailor, for who wants to be a derzie? Nor shall I, furthermore, choose an innkeeper, for who wants to be a chowkidar? Or for that matter a beggar or a thief or a water-carrier or a dhobi who spends his existence in this world washing clothes on the banks of the river!

"No! I shall choose to be a great man! I shall choose to be a knight, an I. C. S. wallah! A deputy commissioner! Yea, I choose to be a marquis, for I have the blood of a noble family in my veins, even though I spit the red juice of betel nut from my mouth.

"In a word—" so said this miserable pariah among men—"I shall change places with the Marquis of Croone, who is darogah to the Maharaja!"

Now this said marquis was an honorable man, and one whom kings delighted to honor. A man of power, with carriages and horses and men. A pillar of the British Raj—who lived in a great house with avenues of palmyras leading thereto—and fountains in his garden.

And Shrake brooded upon the greatness of this man and said: "Am I not of as good blood as this marquis? Were not our families of the same caste in England? Was not my father's father as good as his? Shall I fill my belly with the husks that the swine eat—while this man consorts with rajahs? No, I will be the Marquis of Croone myself! And the Marquis of Croone shall inhabit my carcass! Yes, my carcass shall depart from me and be removed from me as a shepherd's tent! And I shall be born again!"

The Third Leaf of Papyrus.

It is written that the miracle performed by Daj Doraj did not take place until a year had elapsed since that day when Shrake Sahib, despised of all men, came to him in supplication.

I have heard it said that when Shrake Sahib went to the residency bungalow—purportedly to exchange his soul for the soul of the Marquis of Croone — he was met with rebuffs.

Yes, he was cast beyond the gates of the compound, even as one casts out a hawkah who is unwelcome and who peddles inferior merchandise at exorbitant prices.

Such indeed was just what Shrake Sahib proposed to do: His soul was a damaged soul. He proposed to trade an old lamp for a new! The soul of a drug-sodden renegade for the soul of a covenanted civilian—what a bargain!

And yet part of the miracle, so we must all agree, was this: that Shrake Sahib succeeded—after the lapse of a year—in this most unheard of trade.

And the manner of his succeeding I will now set down upon this clean leaf, and when I am through the leaf will be ugly with the hideousness of the incident—even as if white ants had ravaged the script! Or as leprosy weaves its silver threads upon the skin.

Now from the time of the Aribi crops—even until the spring of the following year, the going and the coming of the monsoon, the time of new talk, even until that same time twelve moons later—Shrake Sahib beleaguered the marquis.

But he did it, "as the spider which taketh hold with her hands and is in king's palaces."

He came first as a beggar and they received him not. He came next as an Englishman, wearing a pith helmet, and with shoes upon his feet. And the keepers of the residency bungalow were afraid to spit upon him, though they knew he was a pariah Englishman and not to be honored.

And he stood before the marquis and told him:

"I am of your country; behold me. I am in want. I am hungry. Do not give me a stone when I ask for rice. Do not cast me into prison when I ask for work. Do not revile me when I come to you as a brother. I am no Hindu, I am no hawkah. I am no pariah dog to be stoned and cast beyond the gates of the city."

And the Marquis of Croone, who was a just man, though a hard one, put him into his stables to be the head groom over his horses.

Now it is known that a horse-keeper is a low-caste menial, and the touch of a horse is a pollution. Doubtless the Marquis of Croone had this in mind. Otherwise, why did he not send him as an overseer of his cows? Simply because the cow is holy and the horse is unholy. Therefore the marquis was just and wise and did the right thing according to his wont.

So Shrake Sahib went to the stables, and he saw that the work put upon him was toilsome. And he said to himself:

"Am I a groom? Am I a toiler? My blood is as good as his. My father is as noble as his. And yet I am a hostler, while he rides on a horse and goes hunting with a cheetah and with many rajahs. I am a horse-keeper while he races the horses that I feed, and wins bets at the gymkhanas!"

And he said further:

"I will do my work just so-so. I will pretend to work, whereas in reality I will eat opium and dream dreams as usual, living the life of a viceroy in my mind."

So it came to pass that the Marquis of Croone—who was a sharp man and a wise one—observed that his head groom, whom they called simply Shrake, was doing his work only so-so. And that he was a reprehensible and a drug-sodden fellow.

Now it may be thought by any who read these annals that the marquis would immediately have discharged this man whom he had hired, and who did not give the right account of his stewardship. But it was not so.

The marquis was, as aforesaid, a sharp man, and a wise one. He knew that all men had their place, and that all men could be used according to their abilities and their caste. Thus one who is of the sweeper caste can be used to arrange the bedchamber in the morning. One who is of the butler caste can be used as a khansamah; one who is a bhisti can be sent out to water the roads; and, furthermore, one who is of the robber caste can be used to plunder an enemy—or to serve as a watchman and sleep on the veranda, and thus keep off his caste brethren.

These truths were not overlooked by the wise marquis. And by the understandings of these things he had become a leader among men.

And so it happened that this marquis had a certain bit of work which he desired to apportion to some one or other. And he bethought him: "I must apportion this work to a man who is without moral stamina, because the work is sinful; and I must apportion it to one who is sodden with hashish, for it will take the false bravery of a drug addict; and I must apportion it to one of my own race; for it is a confidential piece of work, and one that I can trust to no native who at the present moment comes to my mind."

So he bethought him of the shiftless British beggar whom he had sent into his stables.

And it was a thought that must have been sown in his brain by a malignant planter! By Kaali-ka, or Siva or Meenarchi or any of the most malignant of gods or devils!

For this one act—which was the commissioning of a man to destroy another—was all that was needed in order that the miracle of taking away his soul might be accomplished!

The Fourth Leaf of Papyrus.

I record events which were handed down from the mouths of low caste men. I write of exalted things which have been muddied by the words of pariahs. Even as the buffalo goes down to the river and muddies the crystal water with her hoofs. As the shadow of a hostler falls upon a Brahman's rice darkening its snow white color.

Thus the bargain between Shrake Sahib and the marquis was reported to me by a sweeper and a punkah boy, who stood behind tatty curtains and gave ear to the words that were passed between them. But of the inner meaning of their words, the sweeper and the punkah boy were ignorant. For the marquis was careful to couch his meaning cunningly—for the fear that some spy might overhear him and thus cause his downfall.

So the marquis said, guardedly: "Will you do this thing?"

By that—I know now, these many years later—he meant, "*Will you murder this man?*"

And Shrake Sahib, who stood before him in the inner chamber of the residency bungalow, scratched his chin, which was unshaven, and bethought him for a long time.

And the marquis looked upon him and pitied him, for Shrake was a miserable man, with eyes that were sunken but flaming, and teeth that were black, and lips that bled with the juice of betel-nut and lime. And his hand trembled as the hand of an old dhanuk who can no longer hold an arrow to the bow.

Then, after a long time, Shrake Sahib said: "It is a dangerous commission. I am a poor man. If I were discovered in the perpetration of this thing and were cast into prison, who would hear my voice and help me out?"

And in this Shrake Sahib reflected wisely, for is there not a saying among the Tamil peoples: "Will the words of the poor reach the council chamber?"

And the marquis accounted this a good point, and said: "I will protect you as a brother."

"But in payment for this risk I take—" the renegade began.

"Ah, yes, even so!" the marquis said. "One good turn deserves another." Which is an Englishman's quaint way of saying what we Hindus often say: "The bandy goes in the boat and the boat in the bandy."

"By that you mean to make me promises?" the miserable Shrake asked, wiping his nose with his hand, and sucking in the red blood of the betel which was driveling from his mouth.

"No promises," the marquis said angrily, "but payment in rupees. Name your price."

"What do I want of rupees?" Shrake exclaimed in scorn. "What good is it if the etti fruits or the avaricious prosper? I am a heap of filth."

"If you do not want money, what do you want?" the marquis asked impatiently.

"*I want a new soul!*" Shrake cried with a throat-tearing cry.

The marquis laughed, holding his sides. "A rather extortionate price to ask," he guffawed.

"A new soul!" the wretched man wailed. "Mine has been dragged in the mire until it is black! And now this new stain which you are bidding me besmirch it with! What will it be worth—a cowrie shell—a heap of carrion—a thing that rots and smells to Heaven! I shall not do this thing for all the rupees in India! No, by Heaven!"

The marquis was perplexed. Had he judged his man wrongly? It was a dangerous thing to broach this subject of murder and then be refused.

"Look here, my man," the marquis said tolerantly. "Just what do you mean? I am asking you to do a dangerous thing. That I know. And I am willing to pay. If I cannot pay in rupees—what other commodity?"

"A new soul!" Shrake Sahib cried again with tortured vehemence.

The marquis, thinking the man crazed with hashish, spoke still more softly, and as if to humor him.

"I want to give you what you ask, my man. But, look here, I am not a dealer in that sort of merchandise. How can I give you a new soul? What nonsense!"

"How—you ask me how?"

The marquis saw the strange flames in the renegade's sunken eyes, and he was afraid. He realized that he had done wrong in picking this man. The fellow was too far gone to be trusted—even with the foulest of business. He must be humored. For if he were crossed there was no telling what he would do. Most certainly he would proclaim the incident from the housetops, and the marquis would be shamed forever.

"Come now," he said. "Pull yourself together. Tell me what you want. I see you have some squeamishness about the guilt of this thing. But, look here, I myself will take all the guilt!"

"Very good. But it must be more than the mere promise of your lips. Your promise is no more good to me than a dumb man's dream which perishes in the morning."

"How then can I take the guilt?" the marquis asked in great perplexity.

"*By exchanging your soul for mine!*" Shrake cried triumphantly.

Again the marquis laughed. For such words meant nothing to him. They were the gibbering of a hashish fiend—the chattering of a bird in a banyan tree.

But to humor him the marquis said:

"I would gladly give my soul to you in exchange for yours; but it seems to me it would be a rather difficult operation."

Then said Shrake: "It can be done."

And the other smiled indulgently: "Oh, yes, I suppose so."

And Shrake swore by his particular god. Whereat the other's smile turned to a laugh.

"How can it be done?" the marquis asked, wisely continuing to humor the man.

"It is a miracle that is not unknown in this country," said Shrake.

"Oh, yes, perhaps these damned Hindus can pretend to do that sort of thing," the marquis said, still chuckling.

"There is a swami living on a hill—not so far from your compound," went on Shrake. "And it is said that he can take the soul from one man's body and house it in another's."

"Quite extraordinary," laughed the scornful marquis.

"You may laugh me to scorn; you may revile me; you may spit on me; you may think me crazed because I believe in this swami—"

"Oh, not at all," laughed the marquis.

"But even so, I will take no other payment than this: you will be responsible for this crime; the guilt is on your hand, not mine. Even as that betel juice which besmirched your palm when you closed my mouth."

"I have agreed to take the guilt," the other retorted, now impatient.

"But you must take my soul and give me yours."

"Damn it all, I agree to that!" cried the elegant marquis, with a fine swagger. "What care I for a soul? It is a mere whim of yours—a bit of savage Hinduism which in your right senses you yourself would scoff at. Do what you please. Let the swami perform his rites. I know this swami. Doraj. He is a good Hindu. If it will only satisfy your insane whim, I'll let him try all the hocus-pocus he wants. I dare say he won't use a knife to cut my heart out?"

"This is an operation not of the body, but of the spirit," said Shrake. "It is needless to fear that he will so much as touch a hair of your head."

Thus, having no conception whatever of the actual and unspeakable nature of this miracle, the scoffing marquis consented to submit to the rites. And in an attitude of merry sport he surrendered himself to all the most malignant and hideous gods of the Pantheon. Thus did he go to the gates of the grave to be burned. Thus was he deprived of the residue of his years; and even thus was he delivered to the pit of corruption.

And he was damned forever and forever.

And Kaali the Black, Kaali dripping with blood, Kaali encircled with snakes and adorned with skulls, took him into her bosom.

The Fifth Leaf of Papyrus.

Thus did Shrake consent to murder the enemy of the Marquis of Croone, and the commission of it I will now relate. But I will not relate it in my own words, but in the words of a certain Toda herdsman who was an eye-witness to it.

And thus did the Toda herdsman narrate this affair—even to my ears:

I am Jad, son of Jad the Toda. And I keep buffaloes, which at eventide I drive to the river. Now, my eyes are very good eyes, even though the lawyers at Madras proved beyond peradventure of a doubt that I am purblind. But I can see the kite when he flies before the sun; and I can see the owl when he flies before the moon. And from my hill to the plains I can see the rice fields and the men like ants.

And behold when I was at the river with my two buffaloes I saw a certain man riding in the hills—as was his wont—after the setting of the sun. And this man was a small man, with a gray beard and the raiment of a gentleman. For he was an English planter. Yea, this was the victim whom Shrake was commissioned to murder. For this man was the enemy of the Marquis of Croone.

And lo, there came riding up the ghats another man—who was the renegade Shrake, likewise mounted upon a horse, and riding as if to replenish his lungs with the air of the hills at the time of gloaming—as is the wont of many of these Englishmen.

So I hid in the bushes, because Shrake Sahib was a fierce-looking man whose face was unshaven and whose stubbly beard was unclean. Thus I feared him—and moreover the red light in his eyes, which was fiercer than the light of the sunset beyond the Nilgris, did strike terror into my heart. Therefore did I hide myself.

And when these two men came together I heard what passed between them.

And I heard Shrake Sahib say:

"Salaam to you, my friend."

And the hapless tea-planter said:

"Who in the devil are you to say salaam to me?"

And Shrake said:

"I am no one you will ever see again."

"Then what do you want?" his victim asked.

And Shrake gave answer:

"I want nothing more than a light from your cheroot."

And the other said:

"I cannot refuse you, for I see that you are a white man. At first I thought you were an East Indian. But you speak as an Englishman of breeding—and not as an East Indian speaking chi-chi-bat."

So they passed a light one from the other, leaning across the saddles. But when the smoke went up from the cheroot in Shrake's mouth he did not draw his horse away, but sat as if he had not yet kindled the light.

And the hapless tea-planter said:

"Look here, my man, you have a light, have you not? Do you propose to puff at my light all evening?"

Whereat Shrake Sahib said in a voice which struck terror into my heart: "My friend, I will puff until there is no more life left in this cheroot."

And the other drew back; but he found that Shrake had put one hand upon the bridle of his horse.

And Shrake Sahib said: "Is it possible you mistook me for an East Indian, when I am a man educated at Oxford, and of noble blood?"

Whereat the other was wroth, and replied: "You are indeed a desperate-looking man an unshaven, and with betel juice upon your chin. Why should I think you are of noble English blood? It is a natural mistake, and I am not to be blamed. But to avoid a scene between two Englishmen I will gladly ask your forgiveness."

But the murderous Shrake would not take this apology, and instead he gave answer: "Is it possible that you ask my forgiveness when you despise my betel-stained chin?"

And this time his victim held his peace, for he was sore afraid.

Whereat Shrake Sahib went on smilingly: "Look well upon my hideous countenance then, my friend! Peer into my eyes, dwell upon the color of my chin, the filth of my temples, the stain of my lips! For I am built in the image of God—as all men are!"

Then did he run his hand down the bridle of the man's horse till he laid hold of the white jacket the man wore.

"Look well upon me—upon this human countenance before you, my friend. The noblest of all pictures—a human face, molded in the image of God Himself! For it is the last human face you will see upon this earth!"

Then did he draw a knife and plunge it into the belly of his victim, so that the white jacket turned red. And he twisted the knife as a man will twist the tail of his oxen to speed his journey. Thus did Shrake Sahib speed the journey of this hapless tea-planter toward eternity.

And the tea-planter groaned and clutched at his red jacket and alighted slowly from his horse and sank to the dry-caked river mud.

And he was no more.

Then did Shrake Sahib gather the reins of his own horse and ride at a gallop toward the approaching night.

And I myself took up a bamboo stick and drove my buffaloes from that abhorrent place.

But the next morning I returned and, lo, I saw certain robbers who are brethren of a noble caste divesting the carcass of such as might prove of value. And it was because of that deed of thievery that one of the robbers was apprehended and hanged in Shrake's stead.

And, behold, the carcass that I saw lying on the caked mud that morning was a foul thing, and the robbers soon left it. And the green-bellied flies came and buzzed loudly. And a bird of carrion came and gorged itself, and I held my nose and went away.

And let me be damned until the seventh generation if every word that I have said is not true.

Now I have cause to believe that all this that the Toda herdsman narrated to me was the truth. But the solicitors in Madras proved that he could not see, and that the hour was late, and by this quip and that they freed Shrake Sahib from all blame. And there is not an Englishman in India to-day who believes that Shrake was guilty.

Indeed the history of Shrake from that day on is one that is comprehensible only to the Hindu mind, for it is a history of spiritual things—and not of material

things. Concerning material things the Englishman is wise, but concerning the spirit he is blind.

Therefore what follows will not be believed by Englishmen—so strange it is. And even certain Hindus who have heard it will scarcely give it credence.

But I have heard of these things from many reputable authorities. And the miracle of Daj Doraj, which was performed immediately after Shrake committed this hideous crime, is written in many tongues, in Tamil and Telugu and Hindu and Hindustani. Many mahatmas preach it, many devotees believe it, and many other swamis—possessed of devils—have attempted it but failed.

So now I will write of how that miracle was accomplished.

The manner of it was most wondrous to tell of: Behold the marquis—in a spirit of merry sport—riding to the humble bungalow of the swami in order to submit to the rites. These rites, so the marquis was told, were to absolve Shrake from all guilt. And his heinous crime was to be upon the head of the marquis alone.

He came to the house of Daj Doraj, and as he came he rode in his carriage with hostlers, and with runners at the side. Thus does pride go before destruction!

So he alighted at the house of the swami, and sent his hostlers and his runners home with the carriage, bidding them not to return until he sent a chuprassy after them.

Then he went in and found that Shrake was already there waiting for him. And the swami likewise.

Now this swami, Daj Doraj, was a venerable man, with white beard and lordly aspect and eyes that were wells of wisdom. And he deemed it just that the Marquis of Croone should become Shrake, and Shrake the Marquis of Croone. For, mark you, no such heinous deed as the murder of a man can take place with impunity before the gods.

But, thinking these rites were the foolish rites of a savage—as, for instance, a Dravidian devil-worshiper—the marquis had no fear, but only a humorous condescension. For he saw that Shrake would be satisfied with no other payment. And this payment, so thought the marquis, was a very simple matter indeed. Something to be laughed at—but necessary.

Now behold, even before the marquis knew what was going to take place the swami, by burning certain clouds of incense in lotahs and such other vessels of curious workmanship as were about the room, caused a deep sleep to fall upon both the marquis and Shrake.

And for three days the two Englishmen were as dead.

And the swami performed his rites over the bodies, and uttered the great word which is hardly to be uttered by even the holiest of Brahmans, which is the word Om!

And he took the blood from the ear of one, seven drops thereof did he take, and poured them into the ear of the other, according to the rites which solemnize this deed.

And he offered the blood of each man as a sacrifice. Seven drops of the blood of one man, and seven of the other, did he offer as a sacrifice to Brahma and to the Destroyer, which is Siva Bhairava the Gracious.

And he offered fruits without blemish, breadfruit and mango and papaw. Of these fruits did he offer sacrifices to the lesser gods.

And from the Yajur Veda, which is the book of ritual, did he read for three days and three nights.

And diverse other rites did he perform which are not known to one of my caste. And he uttered words which are unutterable in the mouth of any save a swami.

And when he had completed this task, behold Shrake Sahib's body housed the soul of the Marquis of Croone, and the body of this latter was an habitation of the miserable soul of Shrake Sahib. And one man became the other, and there was a transmigration of souls. But it was accomplished without what the English call death.

And how this was brought about no man can tell, for it was a miracle. But it is written in many religions that the soul is in the blood. Wherefore, look you, how can it be said that this was a mere rite of Hinduism, when all religions proclaim this truth? Nor is it a savage rite to be laughed to scorn, as the Marquis of Croone laughed.

Nay I say to you verily this miracle was accomplished. And one man became the other. And lo, the swami brought them back from the bosom of destruction, and they were as men awakened from a deep sleep.

And the Marquis of Croone was confounded and knew not what had happened. Save only he knew that he had slept. And he was wroth.

Then did the swami say to him:

"From this day forth you will be as the renegade Shrake—and he will be even as you are—a great man."

Then did the marquis give answer and say:

"What have you done to me that I have slept? My head is tortured with pains. My eyes are dimmed. I am drugged. You are a reprehensible man, and I shall cast you in prison!" Thus did he speak to the swami.

Now the swami was aware that the miracle he had performed was worse than if he had taken the marquis's life. So the swami repented his miracle, and for fear of the gates of the prison he mounted upon a tat-pony and fled into the Nilgris, where the mountains took him into their bosom.

And the marquis ran out from the wretched bungalow and called to his chuprassy, who had likewise been drugged, and sent for his horses and his men. And, behold, he had been absent from his affairs of state for three days, and knew it not.

But his men knew it and told him. And he was exceeding wroth, and told the director of Central Intelligence to search out the swami Doraj. But it was like searching a bandicoot in a jungle, or a water beetle in a rice paddy.

And the marquis was likewise wroth at Shrake Sahib, who was to blame for this adventure. But he dared say nothing to Shrake Sahib—for was it not a truth that he had employed him to murder his enemy? If so, how then could the marquis raise his voice against him?

Now it came to pass that seven days after the miracle had been accomplished the marquis was in his bungalow, brooding at even-tide over the strange adventure that had befallen him. And he was confounded, for his interests in state, in tiger hunting, in the reviewing of troops, in the arbitration of rajahs' quarrels—all these interests, I say, had left him. And they seemed to him like broken toys which a child casts away.

Yea, he took interest only in his strange fate, and brooded thereon. And rubbed his hands as if attempting to wash them of the crime of that murder. And, behold, on the seventh day at eventide he looked upon his hands and they evoked the picture of the hands of that miserable renegade, Shrake Sahib.

And he bethought him and remembered that Shrake Sahib had come to him after slaying the specified victim, and he remembered that upon Shrake's hand was a clot of blood. Yea, it was a clot the shape of a flying fox—that is to say, a bat.

Now behold, a rash had come upon the marquis's hand. And the dresser when placing ointments upon it affirmed that this rash had come from the nervous and continual manner in which the marquis rubbed his hands in the evening and the morning of so many days.

But the marquis shook his head and said to himself: "This is not a rash. It is a clot of blood. It is a stain which all the ointments of India cannot wash out. And 'all the perfumes of Arabia'—said the marquis, quoting some book or other—'will not sweeten this hand!'"

And behold, the stain on his hand was of the shape of a flying fox. And then he knew that it was part of the swami's miracle, and that the murder which he had commissioned another man to perform was laid against his own soul, and that the blood of that murdered man was upon his own hand, as a stain!

And for the terror of these things—and the fear which that clot of blood struck in him—the Marquis of Croone ate hashish. And from that day on he was despised among other covenanted civilians. The soul of a renegade possessed his body. Therefore he became himself as a renegade.

And he said to himself: "What's done is done!" And he said further, repeating a Tamil saying he had heard many a time: "'Will the flood that has burst the dam return, though you weep?'"

So he took more hashish. And he frequented dram shops, and went into another city. Nor did he shave his chin. But he went unshaven and wore a dirty helmet on his head, and on his feet he wore shoes that were without pipe clay. And his teeth darkened, for that he chewed betel nut and lime. And his lips were stained with the red of betel juice as if he had bitten them. And lo, he was a pariah among men.

The Sixth and Last Leaf of Papyrus.

Many monsoons came and went, blowing northward and returning six moons thereafter like a hare doubling back upon its course to escape the jackal.

And the Marquis of Croone sank lower into the bosom of corruption. He went from this municipality to that, from this kingdom to the one adjoining, but he never sailed the black water for his own home in England; for lo, the spell of India was upon him.

And the spell of Kaali and the malignant gods was woven about him.

Thus it came to pass upon a certain eventide when the monsoon broke and the rains fell, and the planters cried "Rám, rám, Mahades!" and gave thanks unto their special gods, that the Marquis of Croone was in a dak bungalow. And as was his wont, he ate hashish until time was not; yea, he ate thereof until the banyan trunks turned to cobras and the pillars of the bungalow moved like elephants filling in their keddah.

And he slept and dreamed dreams; and when he awoke he was consumed with a great thirst.

And he said to the chowkidar who kept the bungalow: "Put water on my tongue, for the whole world drinks of the rain of the monsoon, but I burn with a great thirst. Put water on my lips. And pour water into my smoldering belly."

But the chowkidar, who was a man of some experience in these matters, would give him no water, knowing full well that this would peradventure destroy him, even as water from the well will destroy living coals.

But, instead the chowkidar, prepared a certain drink in the half of a coconut shell; and this he gave to the miserable marquis.

And the marquis looked at the shell and at the drink it contained, for it was oily and black.

And behold he saw his own face reflected therein.

And he started back with a dolorous cry, and beat his breast, and gnashed his teeth. Then did he say aloud:

"Who is this man whose face I see reflected in your coconut shell? What manner of hideous visage is contained therein? Is this some other damnable Hindu miracle, that you offer me wine in which there is a devil mahoo grinning at me and mocking me?"

And he snatched away the cup, throwing it upon the chunammed floor, so that a pungent scent as of ghoor filled the dak bungalow.

But the chowkidar, waxing wroth at the spilling of his carefully mixed drink, said to this despicable man:

"O foolish and reprehensible sahib, are you a white man that comes to my bungalow to rave in your madness? It was your own face that you saw in that coconut shell."

And the marquis raised his voice in a scream. And it was like the cry of a noble peacock that is caught by a jackal.

"It was not my face! Nor was it the face of a mahoo. It was the face of a man whom I have known these years past. Verily I remember that visage well. It was the face of one Shrake Sahib—a very wretched and loathsome man."

"It was your own face, sahib!" the chowkidar repeated in much heat.

"Yés, my own face!" the marquis wailed miserably, remembering once again that miracle which the Swami Daj Doraj had performed upon him. "My own face, which is become like the face of Shrake."

And the chowkidar was angered still further as he ordered his sweeper to clean up the spilled substance.

"You are a white man fallen to a most despicable estate!" he said in his wrath. "How can I—an honest chowkidar—rent my rooms to such a lodger as you, or give

you board, and still hope for profit? Under such circumstances this dak bungalow is not a paying business."

And the keeper of the place took the marquis by the scruff of the neck and said: "Out into the monsoon rains. You will find plenty to drink out there!"

It was to such an estate the Marquis of Croone had fallen. For lo, he was a British marquis, and yet a humble chowkidar had laid hand upon him!

And as the miserable marquis was about to be thrown out into the compound, behold, another man entered the bungalow, escaping the torrential rains.

Now, this man stood in the doorway, framed, as it were, by the frame of a looking-glass. And because of the mists which came up out of the hot ground during the torrential rains, the illusion that this man was a figure evoked by a looking-glass was all the more convincing.

Thus in this world the reflection is often the reality, and the reality is little more than a reflection. It is for mahatmas to see and to know and to preach to us the real meaning of these things.

Now, the chowkidar, seeing another Englishman enter, let go of the marquis whom he was throwing into the compound. And the marquis stood swaying like a palmyra in the wind, stricken by storm and monsoon. And he gazed with fierce intent at this image of an Englishman whom he thought reflected in a looking-glass.

But it was a real Englishman, and one in fine raiment, in white clothing, and in a topi helment as white as a lily, and with shoes that were freshly pipe clayed. For he had come in a carriage with an umbrella held over him by a hostler, and the rains had not bedashed him.

Now the marquis gazed intently upon him and thought that most surely he was gazing upon a looking-glass. And the marquis said:

"There am I! I am a covenanted civilian. I am an honorable man. I am a man of gentlemanly bearing. See the reflection of myself in this glass, O villainous chowkidar? Am I not still a marquis—every inch?"

And the chowkidar mumbled, saying: "It is not a looking-glass you see there. Nor is it your own image reflected, as you think. But it is instead an Englishman of importance. So out of the way with you, and let him enter into my house!"

But the marquis stood swaying before what he thought a looking-glass. And he admired the fine picture which he thought he himself created there.

"Yes, by Heaven," he cried in an exultant voice, "there am I! Every inch a marquis!"

But the being which he thought to be a reflection smiled and said: "I am the man whom you knew as Shrake."

Then was the marquis puzzled. And he breathed upon what he thought to be the glass, expecting to see a mist form upon it. But no mist came, save only such vapors as already were evoked from the hot ground.

Thus the miserable marquis knew that the image he saw was real. And so he reached out to touch this supposed image, and lo, it was the man he had once known as Shrake!

Then did the marquis lift up his voice and laugh:

"Shrake, is it? Pth't! Shrake was a renegade and an eater of hashish, and a stinking wretch whom no man honored."

Then Shrake said: "Yes, it is even I—Shrake—who was once a renegade such as you are now. But I have restored the years that the locusts have eaten. Behold me now."

Then did the marquis let forth a maniac scream. And he said: "How have you lifted yourself up from that pit of corruption? How are you become now as an honorable man?"

"Do you not remember," Shrake gave answer, "that the Swami Daj Doraj exchanged our souls the one for the other, so that we were born again?"

"I do!" cried the marquis, falling to his knees and beating his sunken breast. "I who was great became lowly. I who was first became last!"

"After that miracle was performed by the swami," the Sahib Shrake said, "I myself ate hashish no longer. My body without the drug was like a living thing

torn apart by kites and crows. But I had courage. Courage was born in my body those three days that you and I were in the pit of hell. And with that courage I became once again a man. And lo, not many days had elapsed before a few handful of rupees that I had put upon the Calcutta lottery won an immeasurable prize. Then with judicious bahaduring, with a bribe here and a bribe there, with dasturi distributed among rajahs and men of high rank, behold I myself became great. I sat in the seat of the mighty. I became a covenanted civilian!"

"You a covenanted civilian! What a grim jest!" the marquis spat. "Shrake a covenanted civilian! What has Shrake to do with the British raj? What has a frog in a well to do with politics?"

And the marquis laughed a great laugh and showed his black teeth, and his yellow face was wrinkled like a parchment that is cast into the waste basket by a writer babu. Thus laughed the Marquis of Croone.

But the chowkidar rubbed his hands and trembled and smiled, for he knew now that an I. C. S. wallah had come to his inn and must be served, even as rajahs and maharajas are served.

So he said to Shrake Sahib: "Enter my house, O sahib, and command me. I am an humble chowkidar, keeper of this inn, but your wish is my wish. Give me the word to cast this reprehensible man into the rains, and it is done. Yea, it is done even though he purports to be a marquis of your own conquering race. Which of course is ridiculous. For one look at him is sufficient to ascertain that he is a renegade. And I might even go so far as to say that he is not a pure Englishman at all, but one with a touch of the tar brush let us say, with four annas to the rupee."

Then was the marquis of Croone wroth beyond measure. For, as you who read this know well, he was a marquis and of noble blood; and it was only because of the miracle of Daj Doraj, the swami, that he was possessed of the soul of a renegade murderer.

So his blood surged within him, and he turned upon the chowkidar, who had already dared to lay a hand upon the scruff of his neck. And the marquis gripped him about the soft throat with fingers that were like the claws of a kite.

And he said: "Chowkidar, innkeeper, robber, son of two pigs! How can you dare to heap these insults upon a white man—you who are yourself so dishonorably born?"

And the fingers, which because of so much drugs had shriveled so that there was little left but bone, closed upon the throat of the chowkidar and choked the death cry that gurgled there like water coming from a coojah.

Yea, like sour wine from a brass vessel came the bleeding voice of the chowkidar. And his eyes bulged outward and turned up so that the veined whites were like eggs that are broken from within by the struggling chicks.

Thus did his life struggle and break through his eyes. And he sank upon the floor and attempted to reach for his torn throat, but his hands were impotent. And he lay there—no longer a man, but merely a heap of clothes an unraveled turban, and a carcass.

And then happened a very strange thing. And I swear that all I write thereof is true. For was it not reported to me by the body servant of the Sahib Shrake himself, who entered into the bungalow after him?

Yea by this servant were all these things reported, and he was a man of some wisdom in these matters, for it is known that he was once the body servant or khitmatgar of the Marquis of Croone himself.

The marquis, drug-sodden and mad, after that he had slain the chowkidar, which was no great matter one way or the other, turned to the splendid person of Shrake.

And Shrake was afraid, but the mad eyes of the marquis held him as the eyes of the serpent hold the myna bird.

And the marquis said: "So you are Shrake, the some time renegade, the filthy, murderous wretch who exchanged his soul for mine, and thus became an honorable man! What a grim jest of destiny this is! Do you not know that to complete this transformation, I—the one time honorable man—cannot be perfect until I have taken a knife and disemboweled an Englishman as

you yourself disemboweled that tea-planter long ago?"

Then did the marquis take a knife from his bosom. And he said:

"Here is that same knife with which you once slew a man, with which you shed the blood that was to have stained your soul, but stained instead my own!"

Then was Shrake Sahib sore afraid, and he opened his mouth to cry, but his voice was faint, and no one heard him save only the body servant who witnessed these things.

Now be it known that this body servant, having, as I said, at one time been the khitmatgar of the marquis himself, was dominated by the marquis still. For a good servant can serve only one master—yea, even unto his death. Therefore he held his peace.

And behold, the marquis lifted the knife. And Shrake Sahib was like a fatted calf, defenseless and without will power so great was his fright. And he turned imploringly to his body servant, who merely watched with complacent musing.

Then did the Marquis of Croone plunge the knife into the breast of Shrake Sahib, so that his white jacket turned to the color of a sun that is dying in the west.

And the marquis cried aloud as he turned the knife in the manner of one who carves a fowl:

"Behold how I—the Marquis of Croone—perfect the miracle performed by Daj Doraj. For now I become as you yourself were—a murderer. Behold me now—a drug sodden renegade, a slayer of men—even as that man Shrake whom once you were!"

And lo, the most wondrous part of all this affair: The Marquis of Croone murdered his enemy in the very same manner as Shrake had murdered that tea-planter. Yea, he even turned the knife in the self-same manner. And as he carved he carved hungrily as if wishing to get back that soul he had lost. But this was not to be, for in place of the soul which he searched in that breast he found merely the gush of blood.

And Shrake fell to his knees and moaned. Then did he stretch himself upon the palmmat and writhe as a karait-snake that is stepped on.

And lo, he was no more.

Now the Marquis of Croone fled out into the monsoon rain and went from one municipality to the next and from one feudal state to the next, but no man could find him.

And the manservant who witnessed these things recounted them to me, and I have cause to believe that what he said was the truth.

But when this servant was summoned to bear witness at the courts he did not speak the truth, for he still remained faithful to his one time master, the marquis, and therefore would not incriminate him. Instead he bore false witness against some man or other toward whom he held a grudge, saying that such a man it was who slew the chowkidar and Shrake.

So the marquis escaped and another man was hanged in his stead.

And it is said that the marquis went into the jungles and sank lower into the pit of corruption; for it was not written in any book how that he could again find the soul he had lost.

So here endeth the strange tale of Shrake and the lordly Marquis of Croone. And I affix my good and honorable name to this matter, bearing witness that all that has been written is true.

Therefore let all those who read ponder—not upon the outward events as I have related them, but upon the inner meaning. For what exists in reality—whether it be a mango or a man or peacock fan—exists only as a symbol of an everlasting truth.

III.

VATHAM SINGH finished the translation of the papyrus leaves and slipped them together so that the fan came to one sheaf.

His listener, pacing up and down underneath the punkah, tortured by flies and by his thoughts, paused now and turned to the babu.

The babu saw that Merton Sahib's eyes glowed with a curious flame. The story of the renegade had evidently gripped him.

Indeed Merton Sahib dreamed often during the hot spell just before the breaking of the monsoon of resigning himself to the evils of the flesh, of giving up the responsi-

bilities, the severe life of a government official. One deed—so he well knew—would start him downward. Perhaps one pellet of opium.

"The chronicle absorbs me," he said to the doctor babu. "The renegade Shrake, peddling an old soul for a new, is a strange, a piteous figure."

Vatham Singh, looking over the brass rims of his spectacles, smiled.

"You came here, sahib, to purchase certain powders from me wherewith to poison an enemy."

Merton Sahib darted a surprised glance at his host, as if he had been awakened from a dream. Then, collecting his wits, he groped, as it were, for an answer.

"Yes, yes, quite. Your chronicle was so absorbing that the intent of my visit was for the moment forgotten."

"I did not read it to you to make you forget, sahib," said the babu. "For the contemplation of taking a man's life is too serious a thing to forget so quickly. I read it for another purpose. You asked me something concerning the cost of this deed.

"Quite right. But you have not yet told me!"

"Not yet?" the Hindu exclaimed. "Do you not yet understand the cost? Well then you shall see presently. Meanwhile I must return to my dram shop and mix the poisons. While I am gone I request only that you remain in contemplation over the strange chronicle I have just translated.

The babu salaamed himself out. Merton Sahib paced up and down the room in a torture of fuming and heat. He waited. He cogitated. This business of mixing deadly poisons seemed to cover a dreadful space of time.

From the direction of the drug shop there came the sound of low and earnest voices. What the devil was that Hindu up to? Why was he talking with anybody when his occupation was of such a secret and fearful nature? A tricky rogue Vatham Singh was! And his tricks were famed and feared all over the presidency.

Finally he returned.

"The poison powders, sahib," he said, "are ready. Now, look you, I must take them to a certain man who lives next door behind the wall of my garden. And I will instruct him to take them to the house of your enemy."

"Why not take them yourself? Why get an intermediary? Is this man to be trusted?"

"Implicitly. But to make it doubly sure that he will hold his tongue I am of the opinion that a word from you, as an Englishman of high station, would suffice to keep his lips closed forever on this matter."

Merton Sahib demurred. "First let me see the man," he said. "It seems to me to be a rather dangerous procedure having an accomplice of whom I know nothing."

"Sahib, you are a well of wisdom."

"When can we see him?"

"It is but a stone's throw from here," the babu said. "And we can go through the rear of my compound, under the shadow of tamarinds. The man's house is just beyond the wall."

"And we can go now? Very well, then. Let us go. This thing must be settled once and for all."

Out into the night they went. Not a star was shining through that canopy of hot mists. Through the pitch black gloom of the tamarind grove the doctor babu led the way, clapping his hands as he walked in order to frighten away any chance reptile that lurked in his path.

But a moment later they groped through the gate of a chunammed wall and came to a mutti hut where a lamp was burning.

Admitted into the stuffy interior they found themselves in a dim room which was heavily scented with bhang.

An old man with bald head and wrinkled eyes—like the eyes of a parrot—sat leaning against the mud wall like a hideous idol that has been partially tipped over.

Not far from this man was a white-haired women of low caste, huddled on a mat, and sleeping, precisely like a dog, at her master's feet.

"Salaams to you, sahib," the doctor babu said. "Arise and welcome this honorable man to your house."

"You call that fellow 'sahib'?" Merton asked, surprised that the doctor babu should thus address so despicable a mortal.

"He is an Englishman," the doctor babu said.

"An Englishman! Good Heaven!"

Merton studied the prostrate man as well as he could under the smoky beams of that vegetable lamp. Never had he seen so hideous a thing. The bald head with its tight yellow skin seemed little better than a skull. In fact, it was like a skull to which rotten meat clung—left there, as it were, by carrion birds who could stomach no more of it.

The man was without teeth, and he sucked at a water pipe, making a gurgling and driveling sound. He was the antithesis of a suckling babe, and yet there was a babe's rapacity and helplessness. Better it is perhaps to compare him to that scrawny half bald parrot behind his shoulder, which upon being awakened squawked out in English: "Every inch—a king!"

The man gurgled at his nargileh pipe, spat, and said: "What do you want of me?"

"A matter of trust," said the doctor babu.

The man grinned, showing blackened gums. It might have been a smirk of pride, but in this man the grin was sheepish, humble, wretched. "You come to *me* concerning a matter of trust?"

Merton Sahib looked at the doctor babu in astonishment: "Is *this* the man?"

"And why not?" The heap of filth flared up like an irascible monkey taking offense. "Am I one whom you cannot imagine trustworthy? Look at me. Get that butter lamp closer to me, so that you can see my face. Have you never seen it before? Every one in India should know this face. The face of a great man. The blood of noble men flows in my veins. I have won battles for her majesty the queen. I have subjugated states. I have built water works. I have instituted famine policies. I have been what I was born to be, a ruler of men!"

He tried to rise, groaned, clung to the winding tube of his pipe as if that were the only thing in the room from which he could extract strength. His knees creaked, his upper lip fluttered weakly, and he drooled, like one in a fit.

The effort to get up from that Hindu manner of sitting was too much, and he fell back again with a thump, an idol of a cast-off religion that has no more significance than the clay of which it is it made.

Then the parrot flapped a wing with the confusion of his master's fall, and squawked: "Every inch—a king!"

Merton Sahib stepped back, aghast.

"Can it be possible?" he cried voicelessly, clutching at the babu's arm. "Is this —the man?"

"It is even he," the doctor babu said. "I have shown you what it will cost you to carry out this transaction. This man gave up his soul. He is indeed of noble birth. Yea, the Marquis of Croone himself."

Merton Sahib covered his face with his hands.

The babu went on quietly, addressing himself now to the hideous heap of rags and flesh on the palm mat.

"We have come to commission you to to perform a certain act," he said. "Do not question. The responsibility of the act will be assumed entirely by this sahib. He has given me his word for that. Now here is a paper of powders—"

"Wait, for God's sake!" Merton Sahib fairly screamed.

The doctor babu paused with his hand outstretched, the paper of powders in his palm.

"Wait! Do not give it to him," Merton went on. "Do not tell him what it is for. It must not be. I understand now. My eyes are open. I know what is meant now by a man's giving up his soul! Another moment and I myself would have given mine up."

He snatched the paper of powders from the babu's hand and tore it up, throwing it away so that the powder spilled and spread into a little cloud.

"Is it possible, then," the babu said, "that you are canceling the order?"

"Yes, before God, I cancel it!" Merton Sahib cried. "*The payment is too high.*"

He hurried to the door, keeping his face away from the man on the mat as if too horrified at the sight. Out into the night he rushed.

"To lose my soul!" Merton was saying. "What a payment!" He shuddered. "To become as that foul and rotting thing—"

The last he heard from the mutti hovel was the raucous utterance:

"Every inch—a king!"

IV.

On his way back to the street Merton Sahib stopped at Vatham's bungalow for his pith hat and cane. The babu hurried after him, joining him in the dallan.

"Look here," Merton Sahib said, turning upon the babu, "where is that sheaf of papyrus you were translating to me?"

The babu reached to a little stand where the sheaf of papyrus lay.

"It is a curio," Merton said. "I fancy it. What is it worth?"

The babu demurred in answering.

"Sahib, it is in a strange language. And look you, it is soiled with dust and ants. Except for the truths set forth upon it, it is without worth."

"Nevertheless," Merton went on, "I have a great desire to possess this. To me it means much."

The babu rubbed his soft hands as if in pleasure. But it was not the pleasure of a tradesman about to make a profitable sale, for the next moment he said: "Doubtless this sheaf is worth more to you than to any other man in the whole world—"

"Yes, before God I swear it is!"

"Therefore, sahib, I beg of you—to accept it as a gift."

Not very long after that night, which had proved such a crisis in his life, Merton Sahib booked passage on a P. & O. liner for home. Thanks to his visit to Vatham Singh, he was still an honorable man.

His salvation he attributed to a curious and shabby bundle of papyrus leaves which he kept at all times in a pigeonhole of his desk. Now when he was about to embark at Madras he did not have this sheaf packed in his boxes, but kept it for his satchel, as a missionary will keep a Bible as a necessary part of his traveling kit.

But the chuprassy in packing the satchel came across the ant-eaten leaves and read a line or two of the characters:

"Report of the Commission on Plant Lice—with particular reference to rice crops and tea: 1870."

And the chuprassy, knowing his master could not read Telegu, and observing that the sheaf was concerned with an out-of-date subject, neglected to pack it in his kit. Instead, he cast it away with other jetsam—a few ant-eaten books, an old pith helmet, a broken shaving mug.

And the chura-woman, in sweeping the bungalow, gathered up the leaves and cast them upon a heap of refuse. Then the monsoon took them and scattered them in the compound, over the roof tops, so after that no man could have garnered those leaves into a sheaf again.

But the story that Vatham Singh, doctor babu, had pretended to translate from these leaves could not be cast away to destruction by any careless chuprassy.

While the leaves themselves were zigzagging above the roof tops of the city, the wise, the tricky Hindu, reflected upon the salvation of Merton Sahib.

"And the means of his salvation I shall not forget," Vatham Singh said musingly. "There was the baldheaded old pariah eaten by drugs and mocked by a parrot! There was the sheaf of papyrus eaten by ants! Those were the means. And as for myself—I was a bee and extracted the honey from that filth! I was a liar—and extracted an everlasting truth from a report on lice!

"May Krishna, incarnation of Vishnu, preserve me forever! For I have preserved a man's soul! In fact, I am as benevolent a liar as ever lived—which means that I shall be accounted honorable. For is there not a saying among the Hindus that '*he who speaks the truth is every one's enemy*'?

"Similarly I believe that he who can lie as incontinently as I myself will have friends enough and to spare for all the days of his life!"

And Vatham Singh was right. For he continued to be regarded as the trickiest rogue in the presidency—as well as the cleverest liar.

And his friends multiplied.

THE END

Kidnaped by Request

By FRED MacISAAC

Author of "Nothing But Money," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I

FRANK CARTER, bookkeeper, is fired by his employer, Henry Wescott, and decides to leave the ranks of white collar men. He gets a job driving a taxi. Over on the other side of the world, the Sultan of Beliganistan, an independent Oriental potentate, falls in love with Fannie Black, famous American screen star, whom he has seen in the films, and sends Prince Ali to America to kidnap her and carry her to Beliganistan on a yacht. The prince is invited to stay at Wescott's Long Island home. On the trip from the boat, the taxi, driven by Frank, which carries the prince's treasure worth half a million, is waylaid by bandits, but the four Beliganistan guardsmen in charge of it slay the gunmen.

Carter, suspected of complicity, is championed by Sally Wescott. The prince, anxious to get in touch with American criminals to aid him in kidnaping Fannie Black, arranges with Frank to meet his "master," whom the prince believes is head of the bandits who tried to rob him. Frank induces his friend, Aaron Goldstein to impersonate a master criminal. Meanwhile Lemoyne, the real criminal chief, gets wind of some connection between Frank and the prince with the treasure chest.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PRINCE MAKES LOVE.

DOWN at Wescott Mansion, Henry Wescott was finding that being host to royalty was not nearly as agreeable as he had expected. The prince treated him courteously, but with no apparent appreciation of his importance. He took command of the household, dictated meal hours, absented himself at will, and betrayed little interest in his host's conversation.

Most of Ali's attentions were offered to Sally, and foolish Mrs. Wescott was quite flustered by the obvious attraction that her beautiful daughter was exercising.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for July 18.

"Just think of it my dear, you might be a princess if you chose," she ventured after his highness had retired to his quarters at the end of an hour's banter with the heiress.

"Some other kind of a princess, mother, if you please. I don't like the idea of being locked up in a harem."

"Oh, but the prince is such a gentleman he wouldn't have those old Mohammedan notions about his wife. Why, he went to Harvard!"

"I'd hate to take a chance. The way he had that poor soldier horsewhipped after I asked him not to punish the man shows that Harvard didn't make an American out of him."

"But it was for your sake. He was resenting an indignity to you."

"I wouldn't put it by him to horsewhip his wife if he happened to want a different kind of dessert for dinner."

"Don't be absurd, Sally."

"Sally is no fool," put in Henry Wescott. "I'd like to see her marry some foreign prince, but none of these Asiatic ones. A title in the family would be something to be proud of, but you can't tell about these Mohammedans. I'm not so sure this fellow is so different from his men, and I'm kind of sorry we had him here. Of course it made a lot of folks, more in society than we are, sore, and I guess they'll take off their hats to us after this, but he treats me as if I didn't amount to much."

"I'm sure he is lovely to me," simpered Mrs. Wescott. At that moment the secretary of the prince entered the room and offered Mrs. Wescott a note on a salver.

She fluttered as she opened it, and Sally giggled. When she had adjusted her lorgnette she gave a gasp of dismay.

"What's it say?"

She read it aloud:

"DEAR MADAM:

"I regret exceedingly the necessity of asking you to postpone your house party for at least a week, but for certain reasons I cannot undertake to meet a lot of people at present. "ALI."

"Why, I can't do that," she murmured.

"His highness will be compelled to leave the house if his wishes are disregarded," said the secretary.

"But some of the people come to-morrow."

"All right, all right," said Wescott, whose face had become very red. "Tell his highness we'll put off the party."

The secretary bowed, turned smartly upon his heel, and left the room.

"Of all the gall," spluttered Wescott as soon as the man was out of hearing. "Busting up our plans like that without warning. I've a mind to throw the whole kit and caboodle of them out of doors. What does he suppose I've got him here for anyway? Because I like associating with somebody next door to a Chink?"

"We'll be laughing stocks if you do," moaned his wife.

"I doubt if he would go," observed Sally. "You may not have noticed it, but we are more like prisoners here than hosts. This guard of his patrols the grounds and pay no attention to me whatever. Get the phone, mother, and tell your dear friends who were coming to-morrow to make it next Friday. I'll help you by calling some of them on the other phone."

For the next hour they were busy making excuses to incredulous expectant guests. It was not a pleasant job.

Prince Ali appeared at the end of that time and invited Sally to accompany him upon the porch to see the beautiful full moon. With a grimace to her father, she acquiesced.

"Do you have such moons in your country, prince?" she laughed.

"Yes, and far more lovely. Some day I hope that you and I shall stand in the garden of the palace at Cashore watching the moon over the Himalayas."

"I think not. Beliganistan is too far away for me to make such a journey."

"It will repay you, Miss Wescott. The world knows little about my people, but we have preserved and improved upon a mighty civilization of the past, that of Persia. Our people are not primitive. When Europe was covered with woods and filled with savages, Beliganistan was a mighty country, and she is a mighty country to-day. We have prevented Europeans from intruding, and they have spread false rumors about us, but we have had to protect our liberties. To permit

the English and the Russians to get a foothold would result in our downfall. One who came as the guest of my sovereign would find herself in a fairyland, a land of roses and wine, of milk and honey, a land of laughing, happy people, and palaces encrusted with precious stones. Doesn't it make you want to go there?"

"It sounds fascinating under this moon."

"Miss Wescott, you would be an ornament to Cashore. You were meant to wear the beautiful female costume of our country and inhabit a Persian palace."

"I like this pretty well. An American girl has a freedom that your women can never have. Don't you keep them in harems like the Turks?"

"The Beliganistans are not Turks. Turks are Tartars. They came from the plains of Central Asia. My people are the same race as your own, sprung from a Nordic stock. Blue eyes and blond hair are common in Cashore."

"But you are Mohammedans. You pray to Allah, and you have several wives, and you have harems, haven't you?"

"In Cashore I conform to the prevailing faith, but of course I am not really a Mohammedan. I am unmarried, and if I had a wife like you I assure you I would never yearn for more. You would lead a happy life as my bride in Cashore."

"Prince, are you by any chance proposing to me?" asked Sally in wide-eyed wonder. Inwardly she was laughing.

"Why not? Are you not lovely? Do I not desire you? Am I not a prince and are you not as highborn a lady as an American can be?"

"Indeed!" snapped Sally. "From your standpoint I am not really a lady; you have admitted it. It would be a misalliance you are suggesting, prince. I am sure when you got back to Cashore you would regret it. You might think I wasn't fitted to be a wife. I am not interested in morganatic marriages."

"You misunderstand me, my dear lady. You forget I am almost an American, a graduate of one of your colleges. I respect and esteem you. I consider you a very great lady."

"Well, I am not going to marry you, prince. You are very charming, but it is my intention to marry an American and help him make his way in the world."

"You do not know me very well," said the prince, mildly. "When you do you will perhaps change your mind."

"I doubt it."

"You will permit me to hope?"

"I can't stop you."

"Thank you." The prince bowed from the waist.

"Let's go in," suggested Sally. "The moon has gone behind a cloud. Father will enjoy smoking a cigar with you."

"I am afraid he will have to forego the pleasure. Your father is an estimable gentleman, but he bores me. I hope you will not tell him, however."

"I wouldn't hurt dad for the world. But in your country doesn't a guest owe some consideration to his host?"

"When the guest is a prince he does his host sufficient honor by accepting his hospitality."

"You hate yourself, don't you?" murmured Sally to his departing back.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MEETING AT THE MAMMOUTH.

FRIDAY afternoon Prince Ali requested of Mr. Wescott the use of his car and chauffeur at seven in the evening. Of course the request was granted. He offered no explanation of where he was going or why, and no questions were asked. James, the footman, conveyed the message to the Wescott chauffeur and did not fail to telephone to his confreres in the village and to his master in New York.

Accompanied by his secretary, and one of his personal attendants, Ali set out. The four soldiers were brought into the house and placed in the prince's suite, with the explanation that there were belongings of great value which it was necessary to guard. The presence under his roof of the men with four killings on their hands did not make Wescott feel particularly easy. Sally was frankly scared. However, they need not have worried; the Beliganistans did nothing without orders.

At the same time Frank and Aaron were making their preparations for the meeting at the Mammouth. Goldstein was of a dark, sharp-featured type, whose hair had already climbed up his forehead though he was not yet thirty. A little powder shaken into it above the ears and he might have been any age. They had discarded the idea of carrying weapons, because Frank knew that he would not shoot first, while the Beliganistans killed when they fired. Goldstein had a racial dislike of lethal instruments. He thought his wits were better.

"If we poke our noses into this man's rooms, and he happens to have evil intentions, we haven't a chance anyway. If we had any sense we wouldn't go at all. But since we are both crazy we must just take a chance that he needs us in his business, and we are, therefore, going to be allowed to live, for awhile anyway."

At exactly ten o'clock they presented themselves at the hotel to ask for Joseph Latora. The telephone operator called and was told to send up the gentleman.

"Suite D on the third floor," informed the clerk. "Right opposite the elevators."

In a moment they were ringing the bell of the apartment. The door swung open.

"Come right in," called the prince from an inner room. As they passed through the short hallway each was seized from behind and his arms pinioned. Hands ran over their bodies, tapping their belts and hip pockets. Then they were released.

"You will pardon my necessary precautions," apologized Ali as they entered the room. "My poor life is valuable to my country. Knowing your character I had to make sure that you carried no weapons."

"I am never armed," said Goldstein coolly. "I undertake no dangerous work personally. Nevertheless I have a long and powerful arm."

"Quite so. Please take seats. May I offer you some refreshment?"

"You will excuse me," replied Goldstein. "I never touch food or drink when on business."

"Perhaps you are wise." He turned to Frank. "Young man, I thank you for bringing your chief. You may now retire to the hotel lobby."

Goldstein concealed a quake. He had not expected to be left alone with the rather terrifying Beliganistan.

"You can speak freely before this man," he ventured. "He will be necessary to this business; he is very intelligent, and his suggestions may be valuable."

"Then I judged rightly when I assumed he was an important member of your company the other day."

"He is my field commander."

"You are a Hebrew; are you not?"

"Yes, your highness."

"I understand why you are the chief of the New York criminals. With his six thousand years of civilization the Jew is the most astute of men. When he turns criminal he is most skillful of all. May I ask you to give me some details of your organization here?"

"I do not think it would be wise as yet."

The prince nodded. "I do not blame you for your discretion, but I must know how powerful you are before I can entrust you with the enterprise I have in mind."

"And what is your enterprise, prince?"

The prince bit his lip. "Will you answer this: How many men do you control?"

Goldstein thought quickly. "I can manipulate some five hundred men. Most of them do not know who they are working for. I have a semi-military organization, generals, captains, non-commissioned officers."

"Why did you not send more men to capture my treasure?"

"I made a grave error in not doing so, but my captain in charge made a more serious one. He was told to shoot everybody but the chauffeur without warning. Foolishly he tried to secure the chest without killing. He feared the gallows, and met death by a bullet."

"Such things will happen," said the prince sympathetically. "I am sure you will not make such a mistake again."

"If he has a dictaphone hidden in the place I'm going to the electric chair for what I've just said." This thought flashed through Goldstein's mind, but his face was cold and impassive. Frank was lost in wonder at his *sang-froid*.

"Are there *other* criminal organizations in New York?"

"None that I cannot reach and add to my forces in case of necessity."

The prince smiled most pleasantly. He had made up his mind.

"I think you are my man," he said. "Now I will tell you my mission. Do you know a motion picture woman named Fannie Black?"

"Yes, your highness, I know her by sight."

"Good. I wish you to steal her."

Keyed up for the revelation of some such crime as the murder of the president, the absurdity of stealing Fannie Black struck both young men as unutterably comic.

It was all that Goldstein could do to keep from laughing in the face of the prince.

"Wha-what do you want to steal Fannie Black for?"

"It seems to amuse you," said the prince icily.

"Well, to an American it comes rather as a surprise. But on second thought I wonder why I overlooked it. Fannie Black is of enormous commercial value. I have no doubt that a million dollars ransom could be secured for her. Her disappearance would knock the motion picture business into a cocked hat."

"I have no intention of holding her for ransom. I am not a brigand."

"Then what's the idea?"

"A great honor is in store for Miss Black, the greatest that ever befell an American woman. She is to be Queen of Beliganistan."

"Oh, I see," said Goldstein thoughtfully. "Does she know it?"

"She will know it in good time."

"Do you intend to marry her?"

"I am not the ruler of my country. I wish to secure her for my sultan. My affections are placed elsewhere."

"Sally Wescott," thought Frank.

"Well now, your highness, that you have given us the idea, it seems far more profitable for my band to steal Miss Black and hold her for ransom than to turn her over to your sultan. I can get a million dollars for her."

"I am prepared to pay as much as you could possibly secure in any other way. The Sultan of Beliganistan loves Miss Black. He has seen her on the films and heard her on the radio. He is supreme lord of five million people, possessor of a treasure so vast that your Henry Ford is a poor man compared to him. Where he loves he is most generous."

"Well, Fannie isn't poor herself. Maybe she would marry this sultan if he asked her, just for the experience."

"His majesty prefers to steal his wives. The willing bride is not regarded highly in my country. Besides, Miss Black would not marry a Mohammedan and consent to share her husband with many other women. That is why I have come to America to arrange for her capture."

"I see. I can kidnap her without much difficulty if it is worth my while, but how are you going to get her out of the country?"

"That is provided for. In France I chartered a big steam yacht which is lying at Halifax awaiting orders. She is very fast and can be here in forty-eight hours if necessary. Your duty will be to deliver her on board the yacht in New York harbor. You will receive the brass-bound chest, which your officer has already seen, when she comes over the side."

"And what's to prevent you from steaming away as soon as you get her without turning over the chest?"

"The word of a prince."

"Not enough. I must have more security."

The prince favored him with an unpleasant glance. "I forgot you are a thief. Well, when I am assured you have the lady in your possession I shall turn over to you the chest with its contents, which are worth a million of your money. Then you take her on board the yacht. You see I am more trusting than you."

"It would not pay us to double cross you. There's danger in collecting ransoms."

"Then it is arranged. Now, how do you go about securing the woman?"

Goldstein had not thought of this. He hemmed and hawed, and finally said:

"Wescott's house is near the sea and a long way from anywhere. If we could get

Miss Black there half the battle would be over. Couldn't you get the Wescotts to invite her to this big house party they are giving to meet you?"

"The Wescotts do not know her."

"That doesn't make any difference. You ask them to invite her. Fannie Black will jump at the invitation. Catch her press agent letting a chance to slip her into society and hobnob with royalty get by."

"This press agent. Is he her lover?"

"I never knew a press agent who loved his star, but he advises her in regard to publicity. You can depend that she will be there if she is invited."

"Very well. The house party assembles a week from to-day."

"If you will pardon me," put in Frank, "we ought to have some one in the house to keep in touch with the prince. The Wescotts know me and they will suspect nothing if I am there. Supposing your highness engages me as a personal chauffeur or assistant secretary. Then I can straighten out any difficulty which may come up."

"That is an excellent idea," said the prince. "Come to-morrow. Report to me. I'll explain your presence. And now, my master thief, what is your name?"

"Morris Wertberg is the name by which I am known to a chosen few."

"Excellent. I shall have the yacht in New York by Friday. Your lieutenant will keep me informed of your plans."

He clapped his hands. His secretary entered. The prince handed him a check. "Get the package from the office safe."

In a few minutes he returned to hand a small parcel to his superior. The prince unwrapped it, and removed a ruby as big as a marble from the box.

"Here is a trifle by which you may remember this interview."

Frank gazed at the big, blood-red thing with admiration. Aaron inspected it carefully. Then he handed it back to the prince.

"If your brass chest is full of such things, I do not want it," he stated.

"What is the matter?"

"Not a ruby," he said laconically.

The prince laughed gleefully. "Correct, my man. I congratulate you on your judgment. This was a test and you have passed it. Here is the real stone."

He produced a second, slightly smaller than the first. This one Goldstein also examined and then pocketed.

"In case Fannie Black should refuse the invitation we shall use other methods, but she will not refuse."

The prince rose to close the interview. The visitors bowed and departed. They spoke no word until they were safely out of the hotel.

"Can you beat that?" demanded Goldstein as they strolled along Fifth Avenue. "Fannie Black is to be a queen." He chuckled enjoyably.

"Of all the diabolical plots!" exclaimed Frank. "Imagine turning the poor girl over to that old fiend of a sultan."

"What a blow to art," grinned Goldstein. "But I would be sorry for the sultan."

"What do you mean?"

"I know Fannie Black. I knew her before she went into the movies. You know they have built up a whole mythical biography about her, but when I was a little boy on the East Side, Fannie Black used to play with me. Her name was Sadie Lipkowsky."

"You are crazy. Fannie Black comes from an old English family. One of her ancestors was an early Victorian novelist."

"That's part of the bunk."

"And she's a blonde."

"Peroxide is cheap. She used to be a brunette. And, oi, what a disposition. She wouldn't remember me, but I'll always remember her."

"How did you know it wasn't a ruby he offered you?"

"I once worked for a jewelry sharp. He was a fence, a receiver of stolen goods on Eighth Avenue."

"It made a hit with the prince and maybe saved our lives. If he had found out we were fakers we would have been put out of business in short order."

"That fellow is a bad actor, all right, but I'm not so much afraid of him. In his own country he would be terrible, but over here he is up against it. You see, he was told to get Fannie and get her quick. He hasn't any idea how to go about it. He is

no judge of American character or he would never have picked you for a crook; you have honesty written all over you. He considered it a piece of luck that the thieves introduced themselves to him immediately. There is a bowstring or a torture chamber waiting for him in Beliganistan if he does not bring Fannie back, and he is probably working on a time limit. Very likely his wives and children are held as hostages for his return. That's the only way I can explain his gullibility.

"You were wonderful. You fooled him completely. But why did you suggest getting Fannie Black down to Wescotts? You are putting her in danger."

Goldstein laughed. "I got so I was living the rôle I was playing. And, for a minute or two, I actually thought I was going to steal her. The fellow is almost hypnotic."

"All that stuff about your organization of five hundred men. You made that up quickly."

Goldstein looked serious. "In the Village we hear a lot of rumors, and some of my bolshevist friends get a living in queer ways. There is some kind of a criminal organization with an unknown chief. It is responsible for the crime wave the papers are always talking about. I was just passing on gossip I've heard, not making it up."

They had turned down a side street leading to their boarding house. Out of a dark doorway a man appeared. A gun was poked in their faces.

"Stick 'em up!" was the stern command.

For the second time in a few days Frank's arms went skyward. Goldstein followed suit.

A man who had been following them came up behind.

"What did that guy give you in the Hotel Mammouth?" this man demanded.

"N-n-n-othing," chattered Goldstein. The second man was going through him as he spoke. A very small roll of bills and an Ingersoll watch were all he secured. No ruby.

From Frank was lifted a gold watch and forty dollars. He had fortunately locked up most of the money the prince had given him in a trunk in his room.

People had turned into the street.

"On your way," said the holdup men, slinking into an alley at hand.

The master criminal of New York and his lieutenant walked on with varying emotions.

"The organization I was talking about is on the job," said Goldstein. "There was a hole in my vest pocket and the ruby slipped into the lining. To-morrow I will sell it, and take a train for San Francisco. You better come with me."

"Not me. I'm going to take that job at the Wescotts."

"Listen, Frank. I like you. I got into this danger to help you out. Now you do as I say. Lay off this Wescott idea. Let the old goat take care of his own family. The gang I told you about are after the prince, and they will get him and his treasure. With that gone, he won't be a menace to Fannie Black or to Miss Wescott. Mind your own business. If you go out there, you stand a chance of being bumped off by the prince when he finds you were lying to him, and by the crooks for getting in their way."

"You don't understand. I've got to be there."

"You're in love with that girl."

Frank colored. "I suppose that's it."

"Well, then, I can't budge you. I'll do this much. I move from Powers's to-night and go into hiding, but I'll give you my address and phone. Maybe there will be something I can do."

Carter squeezed his hand. "You are a good fellow, Aaron. I am awfully grateful for what you've done already. But don't risk yourself further. You've no call to."

"I'll be in reach," said the Jew, rather embarrassed by the warmth in his friend's voice. They shook hands.

CHAPTER IX.

FANNIE BLACK AT HOME.

IT has taken quite awhile to introduce you to Fannie Black in person, but there were so many preliminaries to be gone through—and besides you know her pretty well, or think you do, from seeing her on the screen.

It does not matter whether she is the descendant of a long line of titled gentle folk in Surrey, England, or the offspring of a Polish Jewish family who grew up on the "sidewalks of New York." Fannie is one of the most exquisite and fascinating women who have ever charmed the public. Not so much more than five feet in height, her figure is superb without being voluptuous. Her eyes are very large and dark blue. Her hair is marvelously thick and yellow. Her mouth is a perfect Cupid's bow, and her smile is so darling, so bewitching, so compelling in its appeal that no one can resist it. Fannie Black's smile had much to do with her success, though the keen, sharp little brain that functioned under her yellow thatch must not be overlooked.

Miss Black at this time lived in the most expensive suite in the most expensive hotel in New York. Her apartment contained a dozen rooms. She was unmarried, had no intimate friends, and usually lived alone with her personal maid, her two maids of all work, her paid companion, a frail, elderly gentlewoman, and her social secretary.

She awoke about ten two mornings after the interview in the Hotel Mammouth, freshened by more than ten hours of profound and soothing slumber. New York's cleverest decorator had spared no expense to make her chamber the loveliest in New York.

He had chosen the period of Louis XV as most suited to her Dresden china personality, and, being unstinted in the use of money, had created the atmosphere of Versailles at its most exquisite period.

Despite the loveliness of the surroundings, the yellow head and pink cheeks of the girl in the big bed were the most beautiful things in the room. And when she tossed off the silken sheet, slipped her tiny bare feet over the edge of the bed into dainty slippers, stood up in her sheer nightie, stretched her white arms over her head, and yawned—well, if you saw the picture of "Milady Ysobel" you know what I mean. That scene was taken in Fannie's chamber with Fannie in just such a pose. The censors in Pennsylvania and Ohio cut it out.

Her secretary, a capable-looking woman of thirty-five, bustled in to spoil the picture. She carried a letter.

"For Heaven's sake! Haven't I told you not to butt in here until after I've had my bath and breakfast?" grumbled Fannie. It was not exactly the fluted voice of the radio which enthralled the Sultan of Beliganistan, but it was not unpleasant.

"I know, deary, but this is something you can't hear about too soon."

"Well, what is it?"

"You know this handsome Prince of Beliganistan the papers are talking about. The one whose soldiers killed all the holdup men."

"Yes," with considerable interest.

"Here's a letter from the Henry Wescotts inviting you to a week-end at Wescott Mansion on Long Island to meet the prince. And Mrs. Wescott apologizes for inviting you without having met you, and says that it is the special request of the prince that you accept."

Fannie's eyes sparkled. "It must make her mad to have to do it, because she's got a daughter that isn't bad looking, and she has to bring me down there to make daughter look like thirty cents."

"You'll accept Mrs. Wescott's invitation, of course."

"Why, I think so. My director will be furious because I ought to be working this week-end, but what do I care? I sort of like the looks of this prince, and it will be good pubilcity to be a guest at a party that every society woman in New York would give her eyeteeth to get in on.

"Sure. Write her a polite letter telling her I shall be down Friday, but I must have at least four rooms for my personal use. She is probably crowded, and she'll have to chuck out some guests, but the prince must be crazy about me or he wouldn't have made her send the invitation, and the old lady will arrange it somehow. Then I can make a hit by giving up a room or two when I get there."

The secretary laughed. "What a crafty little cat you are."

Fannie turned on her smile. "I'll bet the prince will think I'm a nice kitty. Don't forget to get Hood, the press agent, and tell him to plant stories with pictures."

Then the world's most celebrated picture star slipped out of her nightie and like a white flash disappeared into her bathroom.

CHAPTER X.

LEMOYNE'S FIRST MOVE.

WHEN Frank reported at the Pink taxi garage the morning after his second hold up experience he was expecting to give notice of immediate withdrawal from the taxi business. But he might have saved himself the trouble.

"Go to the front office," said the foreman.

Sitting in the manager's office was a prepossessing young woman dressed in black. She looked like a show girl, or a minor actress.

"Is this the man?" asked the manager.

The girl looked Frank over appraisingly with her big black eyes.

"That's him, all right."

"This young woman informs me that you insulted her yesterday while taking her to One Hundred and Forty-Eighth Street. She says you climbed into the cab with her and tried to kiss her."

Carter looked amazed at the girl.

"You don't mean me?"

"I certainly do," replied the young woman.

"But I never saw you before in my life."

"That's what they all say," growled the manager.

"I didn't take any passenger to One Hundred and Forty-Eighth Street yesterday."

"You took me, and if a cop had been in sight you'd be in jail now."

"This is some kind of a frame-up," exclaimed the boy.

"Carter," said the boss, "you're too spectacular a driver for us. The Pink taxi is very careful about the character of its drivers. You got arrested a few days ago. They let you off. Now you are accused of insulting a passenger. You may be innocent, but you are in trouble too much. You are fired. Is that satisfactory, miss?"

"Perfectly," replied the girl. "I'm glad to see you don't intend to employ kissing chauffeurs."

She looked Frank over contemptuously, and sailed away.

"This is some kind of a rotten game," Frank explained, when they were alone.

"It may be a frame-up at that," agreed the manager, "but there is nothing for us to do. You can get a job with another company quick enough. I'll say nothing about this."

"Thanks. I think I've had enough of driving a taxi. It's too exciting."

"You've certainly stepped into a lot for a new guy. Get your time. I'm sorry, because you don't look like the kind of chump that would try to kiss a jane in broad daylight, especially as fly a one as that. Here, I'll give you a note to the Grey taxi manager."

"No, sir, thank you. I'm going to try something else."

"Suit yourself."

Although he had intended to quit, Carter felt greatly aggrieved at leaving in this manner. He had not been unhappy driving a Pink taxi. The outdoor life suited him better than office work; the traffic problems gave him plenty to think about; the variety of his fares and their ofttimes queer destinations had interested and amused him.

Goldstein's hints about the criminal gang caused him to think they might be responsible for the trumped up charge which had caused him to lose his job. In that case they were taking an interest in him that didn't bode him any good. He repaired as quickly as he could to the Powers's boarding house, where he collected his belongings. While he was packing Goldstein came in.

"I sold the ruby," he began jubilantly. "I got fifteen hundred for it, about half what it is worth. Half of the fifteen hundred is yours, kid."

"No. It belongs to you."

"Fifty-fifty, or I'll get sore. Did you have any trouble getting away from the taxi company?"

"I was fired before I had a chance to resign."

Briefly he told of the young woman and the kissing accusation.

"And you never saw her before?"

"Never set eyes on her."

"Hump. Frank, you were framed be-

cause the gang wants to keep its eyes on you. They've probably got some one trailing you now. I wouldn't be standing in your shoes for anything, and my own aren't too safe. If you insist on going to Wescotts you need help. Who do you know you could hire to hang around down there and give you a hand in case of need?"

"Why, I don't know," he mused. "Yes, I do, too. Blink Douglas."

"Who is he?"

"A fellow who was in the first division with me. He was a clerk in Wescott's and got fired at the same time. He's a big husky, and a whale of a fighter. He took a German machine gun and ten prisoners by himself and got the *croix de guerre* for it."

"Get hold of him. You are going to need a regiment like him before you are through. Do you know his address?"

"Yes. Got his phone number. He is a go-through guy."

"I wish I was," sighed Goldstein. "You get a thrill out of these things and I get scared. I hate fights and shooting."

"I've been with you in one emergency. I wish I had your brains. And you'd fight all right if you had to."

"Perhaps, but I'd have to be in a tight pinch."

Goldstein sat down and ran his hand through his thinning hair.

"It's the queerest situation I ever heard of. The intelligent thing to do is to go to the police, explain the project of the prince, then see Miss Black's manager, tip him off to refuse the invitation to Wescott's, explain the danger she is in, and let it go at that. You and I beat it for parts unknown."

"And how about Sally Westcott?"

"Write the old man the facts, let him realize the kind of guest he has, and let him get rid of him."

"How do I know he would ever get the letter?"

"Oh, I don't think the prince is interfering with his mail."

"He wouldn't believe anything I told him. He wanted to have me sent to jail as an accomplice in the holdup, but the prince dissuaded him."

"Nice old codger. You should get shot trying to help him."

"It's for Miss Wescott," insisted Frank. "I don't care anything about him. If the sultan would only kidnap him I wouldn't interfere."

"Well, what on earth can you do? If you go down there we can't tell the police about the plot. The prince would murder you. Anyway it's Fannie Black he's after, not Miss Wescott. You know that."

"I don't. He wants Fannie Black for the sultan. There's nothing to prevent him grabbing Sally for himself. I saw the way he looked at her the day I was down there."

"All right. You are probably safe until Friday, when Fannie Black arrives. Then what? The prince has his yacht ready. He wants action. You are supposed to be the second in command of a gang of kidnapers. Are you going to kidnap the girl? Or are you going to confess you were bluffing? And what is this mob which is on your trail going to be doing in the meantime?"

"I don't know," admitted Frank, despairingly.

"After selling the ruby I don't know whether I can go to the police," ruminated Goldstein. "I obtained it under false pretences. Second thief doesn't make best owner in law. I'm darned if I can think what to advise."

"I know," declared Carter suddenly. "I'll go see Fannie Black and tell her the whole story. Then she can cancel the acceptance of the invitation. We gain time, and I'll have a chance to put Sally and her family on their guard. How's that?"

"Now you're talking. That's the thing to do. But you can't get within a mile of Fannie Black. The thing is see her press agent. He'll fix it. We can see him by pretending to be newspaper men."

"Let's get him on the phone now."

"From outside. Your friends may be listening in on our line."

The two young men hastened into the street, entered a telephone pay station, and called the Splendencia Film Corporation. Goldstein inquired the name and address of Miss Black's personal press agent. At first he was informed that she had no press agent, but upon his insistence on the importance of the matter they referred him to Henry Hood in the Times Square Building.

Mr. Hood was reached with a second call. He consented to an immediate appointment with representatives of *The Bugle* on a matter of importance. A few minutes in a taxicab and they were at his office.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PASSIONATE PRESS AGENT.

HENRY HOOD was a sharp visaged, keen-eyed, young old man in rather flamboyant clothes. He received them affably until informed that they were not reporters. Then he tried to get rid of them.

"This is about a plot to kidnap Miss Black," insisted Frank.

"Old stuff. No good. The papers won't fall for that. On your way, boys."

"Miss Black has an invitation to Wescott's to meet Prince Ali, hasn't she?"

Hood came to attention. "Why, yes. I'm getting up a story about it. How did you know?"

"Perhaps you think we're talking through our hats?" sneered Goldstein.

"Sit down, boys, sit down. Now what's the dope?"

In a few words the visitors unfolded the plot. Hood's eyes snapped. He became enthusiastic. "It's wonderful. It's the greatest story that ever broke. And to think it's straight goods. Now what's your idea?"

"Warn her to refuse the invitation. Hire detectives to protect her. Keep her out of the way."

Hood grinned satirically.

"The hell you say. And what good is the story then?"

"This isn't a press story. The woman is in grave danger."

"Listen, fellows. You are all wrong. The way to handle this is entirely different. You go ahead with the plot. Kidnap Fannie. Take her on board the yacht. Collect the treasure. Let him sail away with her. That's what to do."

"Good heavens, man!" exclaimed Carter. "Think of the risk."

"What risk? This prince won't touch Fannie. She belongs to his sultan. He gets her on board his yacht and sails for Asia. He treats her like a princess. Why she gets a magnificent, free yachting trip."

"But if she falls into the hands of the sultan you'll never get her back."

"Oh, say, boys, don't be simps. Don't you see that his only chance is to have this job done quietly. If the original plan went through he might get away with it. Nobody knows it's his yacht. Fannie goes to Long Island. It will be a week before she is missed. Then we don't know where to look for her. But this way it's a cinch. We let him have her. We give the yacht a week's start. Then we raise the hue and cry. We reveal the plot. My God, what a story! The sultan of Beliganistan steals the world's greatest film star to make her the queen of his harem! We appeal to the governments of America, France, England, and India. The navies of the world go in search of her. A thousand torpedo destroyers comb the seas. A thousand airplanes shoot through the air. The radio warns all ships. The United States declares war on Beliganistan. Fannie gets the front page every day for a month.

"Why, that yacht has no more chance of getting halfway round the world than I have of getting to heaven after all the lies I've told. What a romance it is! He falls in love with her films; then he hears her on the radio, making a speech I wrote, and loves her voice. It wasn't her—Fannie's voice is not good enough. I smuggled an elocutionist into the broadcasting room with her. Fannie kind of talks through her nose, you know. Then he spends a million dollars to kidnap her. By the way, I cut in on that money, because I fix it so ten dollars would be a high price to pay for kidnaping her. How about it?"

"You get a third," said Goldstein. "That's the best we can do." He was already enlisted as a kidnaper.

"That's all right. See that you come through. Now, Mr. Carter, you go right down there. Tell the prince everything is fixed. I'll get up a crowd of assistant kidnapers to surround the house on Saturday—better make it Saturday—to make it look like a tough job. Gee, if we could only film the kidnaping! But that won't do. This will make a great film for Fannie after

it's over as news. Maybe we could get the prince to play himself, if the sultan doesn't murder him, which he will undoubtedly do."

Both his listeners were laughing heartily. When Hood got raving he was indescribably funny, but it was easy to see why he had the biggest job in the film world.

"There's an element we mustn't discount," warned Goldstein. "That's the gang of crooks that held up the Pink taxi, got Carter fired to-day, and held up Frank and myself last night."

"*Raus mit um!*" jeered Hood. "We'll work too fast for them. Boys, you've done me a world of good. Beat it now while I get hold of Fannie."

Frank and Aaron left the office feeling very buoyant.

"You had a real idea when you thought of going to Fannie," said Goldstein.

"It was your idea to see the press agent. Now, are you going through with the scheme?"

"Why not? We can play fair with the prince, deliver the girl, and get the money without risk. It won't be our fault if he is captured on the high seas."

Hood had got busy on the telephone and had arranged a meeting with Fannie in the office of the president and general manager of Splendencia, Mr. Adolph Splutz. His excitement and enthusiasm impressed them both over the phone, and they awaited him with considerable interest.

Fannie entered in her costume of a lady of the court of Napoleon. A still unnamed masterpiece dealing with the First Empire, was being prepared. She liked Hood—they were both adventurers, and they were on terms of camaraderie unusual in the film business.

"What mare's nest are you excited about now?"

"The greatest story of the century, the biggest publicity stunt in the history of the world."

"Not a cent more salary do you get; you're overpaid now," put in Mr. Splutz, who believed in taking the bull by the horns.

Hood plunged into his tale. Fannie listened with increasing excitement. Her eyes sparkled. It was obvious that she would play her part in such a drama with keen enjoyment. Hood exploited the idea much as he had to the young men, except that he had thought of a number of additional fanciful details. At the conclusion Fannie seized his hands and they danced around the room like two children.

"Yah," said Mr. Splutz dryly, "it is a very good stunt. We will do it, but it will be done by Fannie's double."

"You are crazy!" screamed Fannie. "Do you suppose I'm going to turn over a job like this to a double? There's no risk, and a trillion dollars' worth of glory."

"No risk?" said Mr. Splutz. "Suppose there is shooting at the Wescotts, and a bullet hits you?"

"There will be no shooting. This is a friendly kidnaping."

"Vell, maybe. But suppose you let Fannie go to sea on the yacht, and by and by the prince he looks through his telescope and he sees one thousand airplanes coming through the air, and one thousand destroyers steaming over the sea chasing him? And he says to himself, 'I must get rid of this woman.' So he bowstrings her and throws the body overboard. Then when the navies of the world catch him he invites them on board, gives them a drink, and says:

"'Fannie Black? You're all foolish. it's just press agents' dope. Fannie Black is probably hiding in the cellar of her house while you chase all over the world looking for her. Search the ship; she ain't here.'"

Fannie looked at Hood and Hood looked at Fannie. The zip oozed out of them.

"Oh, he wouldn't dare do a thing like that!" she protested rather feebly.

"Probably he wouldn't. Maybe he'd rather be put in jail by the United States than go home and get cut into small pieces for murdering the sultan's sweetie. It's a risk I don't hesitate to let your double run, but you're worth too much money."

"I'm going to Wescott's, anyway," declared Fannie. "My double could never go through that part of it without getting found out."

"Sure!" exclaimed Hood. "The double goes with you disguised as a middle-aged

brunette, your maid. At the proper moment you put on her disguise, she makes up as you, and the kidnaping takes place. You come back to New York and hide for a couple of weeks."

"It's kind of a rotten trick to play on Nancy Carr."

"Pouf!" exclaimed Adolph. "She gets paid for taking chances. Look at what she done for you in 'Exquisite Hours.' Remember the time she almost got burned to death and it took her six weeks to get well again? What do I pay her a good salary for?

"Now, there's a girl that would enjoy a free yachting trip with no risk like Hood says this one is. And if this prince is smarter than you think and does get her to Beliganistan, why, being the sultan's wife is better than jumping off ten-story buildings into nets for a hundred a week and no glory."

So it was arranged that Nancy Carr would double for Fannie in the great kidnaping episode.

Meanwhile, Frank Carter put in an appearance at Wescott's. Henry Wescott was smoking an after-luncheon cigar in his favorite chair on the porch. Mrs. Wescott was placidly rocking, knitting, and chattering about the coming house party. Sally, in white silk, reclined in a hammock and read "Sunny Stories."

Frank was circling the house toward the tradesmen's entrance when her keen eyes saw him and recognized him.

"Why, there's that Mr. Carter, who drove the taxicab the day of the holdup. Now, why is he coming here?"

She sat bolt upright.

"What, what, where?" demanded her father. "Confound that fellow—what's he want? Hey, Carter!" he was shouting. "Come here."

Obediently, Frank turned and climbed the high steps to the porch as he leisurely admired the flowers on the lawn.

"What do you want? What's the idea of turning up here again?"

"Good morning, Mr. Wescott. Good morning, Miss Wescott." He bowed to Mrs. Wescott, hat in hand. "Why, Prince Ali was kind enough to offer me employment as an assistant secretary."

"What does he want more secretaries for? He never writes any letters," remarked Mrs. Wescott.

"Oh," ejaculated Wescott. "The prince hired you, hey? Well, it's all right in that case. I haven't anything against you, except it looked pretty suspicious your driving that taxi. All right, go round to the back and report to this Englishman he has as a secretary already." He turned to his wife. "The way this prince fills up the place with servants, we won't have any room ourselves."

"And here is this Fannie Black demanding four rooms, the hussy! To think I have to let a motion picture woman into my house on an occasion like this. It is simply unbearable." The plaint came from Mrs. Wescott.

"Oh, we've got plenty of room, mother. And I'm crazy to see Fannie Black close to. If she is half as fascinating as her picture, maybe the prince will fall in love with her."

"It looks to me as though he was in love with you," said Mrs. Wescott.

Sally laughed. "I welcome competition. Besides, a Mohammedan prince can be in love with half a dozen women. It's part of his religion."

Wescott coughed. "Judging from her pictures, this Miss Black will be an interesting guest. I rather look forward to seeing her myself."

Mrs. Wescott sniffed contemptuously and pulled herself out of her rocking chair. "There's no fool like an old fool. Remember, Henry Wescott, you are not a Mohammedan." With this shaft she waddled into the house.

Sally exploded with laughter. "She's jealous, father."

Wescott's face grew very red. "What the deuce are you laughing at? Can't a man of my age look at a pretty woman without falling in love?"

"Watch your step, dad."

Wescott dropped his cigar and departed after his wife, with much dignity in his broad back. Sally hummed a little song. Then she strolled down the steps and began

an aimless promenade which led her toward the gardens in the rear of the house.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CRIME EDITOR.

IN fiction a master criminal is a person of amazing erudition, astounding intuition, gifted with uncanny perspicacity, fiendishly cruel, specializing in horrible methods of inflicting death, revengeful, incredibly brutal, and full of lust. At the risk of losing the interest of the reader, but because this is a plain narrative of facts in the matter-of-fact city of New York, it must be explained that Lemoyne, the head of organized crime in this city, was just a city editor who was dishonest.

Lemoyne was a very able, intelligent man, temperate in his habits, whose only passion was accumulating large sums of money. He was trained in a school of sensation; he enjoyed power. He loved to sit in the back parlor of his old-fashioned house and create great news stories for the papers.

He got a thrill out of reading the headlines describing a robbery in all its harrowing details. A few deaths made the story better, and he did not object to killings; but he did not cause death unnecessarily. If his henchmen emptied their gats into a few watchmen, or policemen, in order to make good their escape, he did not criticize them, but he regarded murder as unnecessary except when it augmented his profits. He would have arranged to assassinate the President for what he considered an adequate remuneration, and he would have had a lot of fun out of the nationwide excitement created thereby. But if there were nothing in it for him he would not interfere in politics.

He considered his organization as an editor regards his reporters. Their assignments he arranged as he used to select them for his staff on the *Sphere*.

Lemoyne was up at eight every day to find all the morning papers laying on his desk. He read them with minute care. No item was too obscure to interest him. He scrutinized the advertisements very carefully. With his long shears he clipped everything that seemed to be of value. His secretary filed matter away for future reference just as is done on a newspaper. Incidentally this young woman was not a member of his band, and she did her work in complete innocence of the unholy reasons for which he compiled his reference library.

Did the society editor report that Mrs. H. Tottingworth-Towers had purchased the Faure pearl necklace at an auction in Paris, Mr. Lemoyne had the clipping placed with other clippings in an envelope marked with her name.

When the Jones-Browns closed their country house and returned to town, the Lemoyne clipping department noted it. If the Gottenberg Trust company installed a new system of safe deposit vaults, if John Lorgan purchased a celebrated painting, if Henry Harrington cleaned up a million in Wall street, these things were recorded.

The magazines which published photographs and descriptions of house interiors of wealthy people interested him particularly. Inventions and discoveries in chemistry and mechanics, arrivals and sailings from Europe, births, deaths; everything in any way personal dealing with the rich; all such things were fish for his net.

Lemoyne was unquestionably the best informed man in the United States as far as the habits and customs of persons of leisure and fortune were concerned.

A score of mysterious bank robberies, a hundred unexplained lootings of homes temporarily vacant, many hotel thefts, wholesale losses of luggage containing jewel cases and other valuables, numbers of apparently unnecessary murders, in fact about ninety per cent of the things which gave the police department gray hair could have been explained most fully by Lemoyne, and their success was due to the completeness and accuracy of his information, and the speed with which he acted upon it.

Nevertheless he did not possess second sight, and his powers of logic were not superhuman. If he didn't have the facts he did not know what to do. The case of Frank Carter and Prince Ali puzzled him.

Here was a man with a clean record, a war veteran, and a clerk discharged by

Henry Wescott. That he drove the taxi containing the prince's bodyguard and their treasure chest to Wescott's Lemoyne knew to be pure chance. Now what was his present connection with Ali?

Ordinarily he could deduce a situation by pure common sense. Normal people thought and acted in a normal way. But it was not a normal thing for Ali to take a taxi driver into his confidence to the extent of displaying to him a vast treasure, nor for the prince to register under an assumed name to meet the taxi driver in a New York hotel. Lemoyne's agents had not been able to overhear the interview at the Mammouth. Their search of Goldstein and Carter had brought them no information.

The possibility that Frank could be a secret agent of the government had occurred to him, but inquiry in reliable quarters proved that was not so.

Of course the discharge of Frank by the taxi company had been arranged by him, and his representative had trailed Frank and Goldstein to the Times Square Building. There a slip-up had prevented the trailer from getting into the same elevator and they had reached Hood's office without being located. The sleuth had picked them up again on the ground floor, followed Frank back to his boarding place, saw him emerge with his luggage, go to the Long Island depot and take a ticket for Blankampton. He had shadowed him to the very gates of Wescott's, and hung around long enough to get in touch with Johnson, who informed him that Carter was now an assistant secretary to the prince.

Goldstein had not been forgotten by Lemoyne. He had discovered that the Jew was a Greenwich Village Socialist with no previous record of accomplishment, and apparently little means and prospects. What he could have in common with Carter and the prince was also unexplainable at present. Goldstein had moved out of Powers's boarding house while the one sleuth was following Carter, and his present whereabouts was not known. However, Lemoyne had a report from a jeweler that he had purchased a ruby from Goldstein, worth about two thousand five hundred dollars, for one thousand five hundred dollars.

It was all very puzzling to the man in the back parlor of the house in the East fifties.

On the other hand, the house party at the Wescott's afforded a man with a craving for ill gotten wealth a marvelous opportunity. In the house already was the treasure of Prince Ali. The women guests of the Wescotts would undoubtedly wear jewelry valued at millions.

The Wescott house was far enough away from other dwellings to make it practical to raid. To be sure there were six or seven followers of Ali, armed to the teeth, who would fight to the death, and there was Frank Carter and his friend Goldstein, who could not be catalogued. Undoubtedly the police of New York would be interested in the house party and the local police would be watchful. There were several private detective agencies who would have good men on the grounds to protect the marvelous jewelry which would be taken from bank vaults for the occasion.

Lemoyne felt that he could not overlook the opportunity, but that it was a time for him to operate with the strongest force he could conveniently handle, and all the guile he could bring to bear. He was working out his plans upon a sheet of newspaper copy paper when a desk man, in his pay on the *Bugle*, phoned him that a story had just come in to the effect that Fannie Black would attend the Wescott house party and take her celebrated pearl necklace, said to be worth seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars, with her.

This meant that a horde of reporters would be lurking about Wescotts, in addition to the forces he had already taken under consideration. But it also meant more loot.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN A GARDEN.

PRINCE ALI introduced Frank to Atkins, his secretary, informed him that his duties would be nominal, and that his quarters would have to be over the garage, as every room in the house had been required for the big party.

"If you have anything to report to me, speak to Mr. Atkins, who will arrange an audience. But I do not wish to be disturbed unnecessarily."

Curtly he dismissed Frank, who was escorted by Atkins to the big garage.

"Have you been with his highness a long time?" Carter asked perfunctorily.

"He picked me up in London. None of his own crew understood enough English to write a letter. He's a rum one, but a good employer. Little to do and good pay. How did he manage to engage you?"

"I guess he got interested in me because of the holdup."

"Well, it's a pleasant berth. We'll get along all right."

Frank was given a small but well furnished room across the hall from a large room where the four Beliganistans slept together. The two valets occupied one room on the same side of the hall.

It took him a few minutes to unpack. Then he looked carelessly out of the window to see Miss Wescott strolling slowly at the foot of the big garden, which extended for a couple of hundred yards behind the house and garage.

Frank's heart bumped violently. His impulse was to go to her, but his judgment told him that she would not notice him, or, if she did, she certainly would not let him engage her in conversation. That she had been kind to him when he was in trouble did not signify that she would be in the least interested in him now.

After some moments of hesitation he did muster courage to descend and enter the upper end of the garden. At the same moment Sally turned into a path which would lead her back towards the garage. Sensing his presence apparently, she looked up and saw him loitering on the path a few hundred feet away. Then she astonished him by beckoning to him. Frank's feet responded instantly. In a moment he stood, hat in hand, before her.

"I should think, Mr. Carter, your previous experience here would have been enough for you," she smiled. "You must love excitement."

"I don't," he admitted with an inward thrill that she addressed him so familiarly. "I wouldn't have come at all if it wasn't for you."

"For me?" rather coldly. "I don't understand."

"Well," stuttered Frank. "You know I saw what those soldiers were like. That fellow who pushed you might have tried to get even for what the prince probably did to him. And I kind of worried to think of you folks here alone with the whole crowd of Asiatics."

Sally lifted her eyebrows. "I'm sure I'm grateful for your anxiety, but I have a father and a house full of servants, and there are the police and the telephone."

Frank was in agony. "Don't think I'm fresh, Miss Wescott. I don't intend to be impertinent, but I happen to know some things that made me worry. I took this job because of what I know. Of course I was only a clerk and now I'm a taxi driver, and you are Henry Wescott's daughter, and your kindness to me that day was just out of the goodness of your heart. So please understand I know my place. But you may need help sooner than you think."

"Walk this way with me, we are getting too near the garage," said Sally. "Now what on earth are you talking about? I don't misunderstand you at all, and if you do work for your living my father does too. At your age he didn't amount to much. I'm glad you are here if there is anything wrong that I don't know about."

"Thank you, Miss Wescott. I knew you would be like this."

Sally smiled, a frank, honest, encouraging smile. "Now, tell me what you are worried about."

"I can't tell you everything now. But has it occurred to you that the prince and his men are more numerous than your servants, and the telephone can be cut."

"We are practically prisoners in our own house. I've told my father so. But it will be different Friday, for we shall have a houseful of guests, including Fannie Black, the motion picture star."

"I know about that. Do you like the prince, Miss Wescott?"

"Well, he has charming manners and he is very fascinating. But no, I don't like him. He reminds me of a snake."

Her words lifted a weight off his heart. He had been afraid she might have been attracted by him.

"Does he seem to be interested in you, if you'll pardon my asking?"

Sally laughed a little. "He has proposed to me, if that's what you mean. Wants to set me in a beautiful Persian palace in Cashore."

"Good Lord!" This confirmed his fears. Now he knew that the prince was planning to take two American beauties back to Beliganistan instead of one. But he couldn't tell her.

"You were going to tell me something, but all you do is ask questions," Sally complained with an adorable pout.

"I can't tell you much, yet. I want to warn you to look out for him. If he has proposed to you, that makes it worse."

"What can he do? This isn't Beliganistan."

"It's a little piece of it just now. But I'm here, and there are other friends not far away. Don't be afraid, because we'll be on the job."

"Sounds like a melodrama or a movie. I expect when Fannie Black gets here the prince will forget about poor little me."

"No, he won't. Just remember that if I should come to you suddenly to get you to do something there will be a good reason for it."

"What are you, a detective?" demanded Sally, with her eyes aglow.

"Not exactly. Look out. Here he comes."

The prince was coming down the walk.

"Carter, go to your room. How dare you speak to Miss Wescott?"

"It's my fault, prince. I spoke to him. You see, he used to work for my father."

"I beg your pardon, sir. I won't forget myself again," said Frank, meekly. He hastened away with anger in his heart at the interruption of what was the most delightful conversation he had ever experienced. What a girl Sally was! No airs, no pretensions. Full of good sense. And she seemed to like him. No matter what happened to him now, he was glad he had entered the lion's cage.

"Ah, yes," said the prince to Sally, in his most agreeable manner. "It was because of your interest in him on the day of the holdup that I engaged him. Your father wanted him turned over to the police. You American girls are so democratic. But when you are a princess you cannot hold converse with commoners."

"Oh, prince," said Sally, "I thought you only talked about princesses in the moonlight."

"You are the moon of my delight."

"From a Persian Garden," she identified. "I used to know the whole song. I am afraid I wouldn't transplant, prince. I prefer American gardens."

"Because you do not know Cashore. But you will."

"Please talk of something else," she said uneasily. There was a quality of determination in his voice which worried her after her conversation with Frank.

"Then let us talk of the party. You know that it is only for you I have consented to permit myself to be exhibited, like a tiger in the zoo, to your mother's friends. I hate these people who compose your American society, and I detest exchanging small social amenities."

"You make an exception to Fannie Black," said Sally, maliciously. "Mother tells me that it is at your request she is coming. You must admire her very much. Surely she would fit the palace at Cashore more than I would. Or, I forget your religion. Perhaps you thought of transplanting us both to Beliganistan soil."

His highness smiled a little vexedly. "Even in Beliganistan we do not take two brides at once. But I am flattered at your interest. I have been intending to explain why Miss Black is invited."

"Is it necessary?"

"It is my wish."

"Yes, your highness." This was accompanied by a low curtsy, the satire of which he missed completely.

"My sovereign, the sultan, loves American motion pictures. He admires Fannie Black. I am inviting her, at his request, to present to her a jewel with his compliments."

"Oh, how lovely! And is it to be a surprise to her?"

"Completely. So you will please not tell her until the proper moment."

"Not a word. It will be the sensation of the ball Saturday night. You know that mother is planning a grand ball?"

"She asked my permission."

Sally grimaced a little. "Of course that would be necessary. And now, if you will excuse me, prince, I have to go in to go over arrangements with mother."

The prince stood aside and Sally escaped. Frank watched her from his window until she vanished into the house. Then he saw emerge from behind a hedge near the path a man in the uniform of a footman. The prince was strolling in the opposite direction. The footman walked swiftly towards the garage and entered. He had been listening to the conversation between the prince and Sally, perhaps to part of the talk between Sally and Frank. Who was he? What did he have to do with the curious situation which was developing at the Wescott's? Frank had seen his face clearly and would know him again.

He sat down to consider. Blink Douglas was in the village. He had been out of a job and out of cash. Nevertheless he had offered to help out for nothing, but Frank had insisted upon paying him a hundred dollars. With his half of the ruby money and what remained of the five hundred given at the first meeting by the prince, he was able to be liberal. And he had promised Blink that there was more to come. Both he and Blink carried army automatics with plenty of extra clips in case of need.

Goldstein would arrange details regarding the kidnaping with Hood, and in a day or so would communicate with him regarding the delivery of the treasure by the prince. Miss Black would be in the secret. Everything looked smooth, but there was the unknown element, the outfit which held up the taxi, framed him out of his job, and perhaps was planning some coup at this minute. This footman might be its agent on the ground. For a youth who had never done any plotting, whose talent for intrigue was undeveloped, Frank was mixed up in a most puzzling affair. He was as much at sea as Lemoyne in New York.

However, it might be several days before anything happened. In the meantime he was living at Wescott's and could see her every day; perhaps get another chance to talk to her. To a young man in love that was a great deal.

In New York Hood was busily arranging his end of the holdup. Like a good press agent, he decided that he must be on the job. Therefore he had arranged with Fannie to be her chauffeur during her visit to the Wescotts. After due consideration he decided not to tell Goldstein and Carter that a double would officiate instead of the valuable film star.

His arrangements were these: Nancy Carr would accompany Fannie as her maid. Miss Carr looked enough like the star to be her twin, though she was born in Denver of good old American stock, and Kovns was the ancestral home of the Lipkovskys. Being a good actress, Miss Carr was to make up as a middle-aged French maid. A black wig would conceal her yellow tresses. Her nose could be broadened at the nostrils by the insertion of packing, a scar on her cheek, a few lines around the eyes, a twisting of the mouth and darkening of the teeth; these things would obliterate the resemblance.

Fannie in all her glory would attend the ball on Saturday night. A little before two, Sunday morning, which was the hour set for the kidnaping, she would slip up to her room. There she would put on the black wig and make-up of Nancy Carr, while Nancy would slip into the ball dress, remove her disguise and blossom forth as Fannie Black, as she had often done before. Returning to the ballroom she would pass without question for her employer, while Fannie would remain in her quarters in the rôle of the French maid. It seemed a perfectly feasible and workable arrangement. The double would step out upon the balcony at the appointed time on the arm of the prince. The other guests would undoubtedly respect their apparent desire for a *tête-à-tête*. Goldstein, Hood and Carter would take her from the prince, clap a handkerchief, supposed to be chloroform, but actually nothing but perfume, over her nose, whisk her to a waiting automobile, and dash to the port of

Blankhampton. There a power boat would be waiting to carry them to the yacht. A rocket from the yacht would announce to the prince that Fannie had been delivered. On the return of the power boat and automobile the chest of treasure would be turned over to the three conspirators. The real Fannie Black would be strolling in the grounds. She would be picked up by the machine and carried back to New York.

Then the prince and his followers would go aboard the yacht and steam away to an unknown destination.

The disappearance of Fannie would be quickly discovered. A search would reveal that the prince and his suite had also departed. Then Hood would launch the whole story and the world would be turned upside down.

It was a very pretty plot and did credit to the ingenious brain of the inventor, but things do not always fall out as they are planned, and Hood can be excused for being unaware that Mr. Lemoyne and his merry men were now planning to take a hand in affairs at Wescott Mansion.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

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THE MAGNILOQUENCE OF NINETY

I AM having a glorious time,
I've forgotten the meaning of care,
With insouciance almost sublime
Do I rule the whole works from my chair!
(There awaits more than one balky heir
A surprise-party when I've gone West!)
It's a jolly old world, I declare,
But the first eighty years were the best!

Once I argued that life was a lime
From the cradle straight through to the bier.
But it isn't! There's plenty of rime
If it's rime that you're wanting to hear.
Inexhaustible wells of good cheer
That are sweet with a sweetness unguessed
Flow unstopped through the aridest year!
But the first eighty years are the best!

It is thought to a kindlier clime
My hegira must shortly occur.
Lordy, no! I am still in my prime.
Those who say otherwise simply err.
With all manner of incense and myrrh
Are these latter days constantly blessed,
But I don't hesitate to aver
That the first eighty years were the best!

Always idolized, never before
Have I been so cajoled and caressed
By the sex I revere and adore,
But—the first eighty years were the best!

Edward W. Barnard

Fifty Fifty or Nix

By GARRET SMITH

BENTLEIGH FORRESTER was an immovable body. Sally Kane was an irresistible force. Ever since philosophy was first invented, serious thinkers in white whiskers have worried about what would happen if an immovable body met an irresistible force. Well, Bentleigh met Sally. Here's what happened:

They'd known each other all their lives. They never really met until one day, five years after Bentleigh had left his native town and Sally to make his fortune in a New York bank. Bentleigh had just finished acquiring another forenoon's installment of the fortune and was anxiously watching for his fellow assistant paying teller to come back from luncheon so he could go himself, when the phone rang.

"Lady wants to speak to you, personal," said the switchboard operator with a hint of levity in her voice.

"Who is it?" Bentleigh demanded suspiciously.

The girl giggled. "She says to tell you she's the Queen o' Sheba."

"What!"

"That's all she'd say, Mr. Forrester—the Queen o' Sheba."

Parker, his cage mate, came in at that moment.

"Put the call in a booth," Bentleigh directed. Parker was given to facetious remarks that jarred Bentleigh Forrester at times.

Something told Bentleigh that he'd better talk with the Queen of Sheba in strict privacy. Confound these girls, anyhow! Probably one of his light-headed flapper acquaintances who didn't know enough to leave a man alone in business hours—or any other hours, for that matter.

"Hello, this is Bentleigh Forrester. Who is this speaking?" he asked a moment later in the shelter of the booth. His tone was blasé, almost ungracious.

"Ah! Mr. Bentleigh Forrester, the bank-

er?" The voice was a forced and stilted contralto deeply disguised.

"Your majesty's assumption is correct as to the name," he admitted, wearily trying to fall in with the unknown lady's humor.

"We command Mr. Bentleigh Forrester to select for us the most expensive inn conveniently located to his bank and there wait upon us while we refresh ourselves with a noonday repast."

"I shall have to crave humbly your majesty's forgiveness, but the International Trust Company, of whom I am an humble slave, compels its minions to eat in the inn provided within its walls, and to eat in great haste."

"Oh!" The mock majesty oozed out of the voice to a point where it was vaguely familiar. It was followed by a tinkling laugh altogether familiar.

"Dear old Unbent! Haven't changed a hair in a year!" added the no longer unknown lady.

"Why, Sally Kane!"

Bentleigh's weariness vanished in unbounded amazement.

"The same, old dear."

"But what are you doing down here? Why didn't you let me know you were coming? Is this your vacation? When can I see you? Sorry about this noon, but that's regulations. How about dinner to-night?"

"Answer No. 1—Looking for a job in social work in New York, having been fired from my Rochester post for holding my well-known radical views. Answer No. 2—I didn't know it myself till last night. Answer No. 3—See answer No. 1. Answer No. 4—To-night. Answer No. 5—See answer No. 4."

"Great! We've got a lot to talk over, young woman. You didn't answer my last letter. Wrote you over a month ago."

"Oh, I don't care much for quarreling by letter. Too long between rounds."

"So you thought my letter was quarrelsome? How do you make that out?"

Bentleigh was on his dignity at once.

"Tut, tut! Unbenty boy! I don't like to quarrel by telephone either. We'll meet to-night where we won't have to shoot till we see the whites of each other's eyes, and then we can have a dandy old-fashioned battle. I'll tell you where we're going. It's the Mammoth Cave, 310 West Hampton Street. I've got a clipping about it I cut from a Sunday paper a year ago. Made up my mind then it 'd be one of the first places I'd visit if I ever came to New York. One of those jolly, stunty Village joints. Probably you know it."

"Never even heard of it."

Sally laughed derisively.

"I suppose not. The International Trust Company probably hasn't it on the list of places where it allows its young men to go. No, it isn't your kind of resort, Unbenty; but it 'll do you good to go and see how we of the other half play. Now that I'm down here I'm going to put in some time converting you."

"Indeed!"

"Oh, I suppose it 'll be wasted time, but it 'll be fun trying."

"Thanks awfully. Now where'll I call for you to-night, and when?"

"Oh, we'll meet at the restaurant. I don't know where I'll be meantime. I'm out hunting lodgings."

"But, my dear girl, you don't know your way around. Remember you've never been in New York before. The streets run every which way down there and the section's one of the toughest in the city. About one in ten speaks English, and he's usually a crook. We'd better meet at one of the hotels uptown."

"Fudge! It won't be convenient. I never saw the place yet I couldn't find my way around, and you know it. I'll meet you at the Mammoth Cave Café, 310 West Hampton Street, at six thirty. Got it?"

"Well, take a taxi. Don't go walking through the streets there at night, and pick your driver carefully. Some of 'em are thugs, you know."

"Bah! I'll do no such thing. I'm not a rich banker, remember."

"All right. I've warned you. Don't expect me to rescue you if you get into a mess. I'll meet you. It 'll probably be interesting. But don't expect me to take part in any foolishness."

"I won't. I well remember your statement that a gentleman never fights with

any one but a social equal. As for me, you know I'm opposed to fighting anyhow. That's why I'm not afraid of those people. I'm used to them. They see at once I'm a friend. So there you are. No trouble possible. Be on time. And remember the old basis. We go Dutch on the dinner!"

"Oh, pshaw, Sally! This doesn't count! You're in my city. This is my party."

"Nothing of the kind. Fifty-fifty or nix, as usual, Unbenty. Run along and count your money till six thirty. By-by."

Sally hung up. Bentleigh sighed. That's the way it always had been between them. This was just picking it up again where they left off at the end of his vacation a year ago.

Their disputes always ended in a draw like this, peace without victory, leaving their old palship unshaken, but at the same time leaving each unaffected by the other's viewpoint and unable to comprehend it—Bentleigh still the cool, cautious conservative observer of life, Sally still the impetuous radical doer.

Bentleigh liked to see the wheels of life go round, much as he might study the movement of a watch. He might not approve of this particular make of watch, but it would interest him, nevertheless, and he had no desire to tamper with it. Sally would smash the watch open, try spinning the wheels herself, make them go backward, arrange them in different combinations and generally bedevil the works. Bentleigh would greatly deplore such treatment of a watch, have no part in it, yet nevertheless enjoy watching Sally's performance.

It was in this spirit that he rather looked forward to the evening. Sally transplanted into the bizarre setting of a Greenwich Village night club promised rare entertainment, much as he disapproved of the whole proceeding.

It had always been that way, Bentleigh mused. He recalled vividly their first play-spell, when he was six years old and Sally five. He was the new little boy in the neighborhood. Wistfully canvassing social possibilities from the conservative safety of the paternal porch, he had seen Sally romp daringly out of her gate across the street, and, under the very nose of an oncoming delivery man's horse, her little red express wagon trailing after her.

"Hello!" she called by way of introduction. "Come on play horse."

"All right. Come on in here, where wagons won't run over you."

"Aw, no. It's more fun out here."

"All right."

Bentleigh wasn't afraid of the street himself. He'd simply understood that girls were supposed to be. This one was different. He was curious.

"I'll be the horse. You get in and be the lady driving," he suggested.

"No, I'm the horse; you ride."

"Girls don't draw boys."

"I'm not a girl; I'm a tomboy."

There they stuck. They finally compromised by Bentleigh representing a crowd of spectators, while Sally as a combination of fiery steed and expert driver performed startling evolutions around the block. She had finally called the play off with the contemptuous remark:

"I don't like to play with boys that just stand an' look. I like to have 'em do their part."

That was the germ statement of Sally's life principle which she later developed into her slogan, "Fifty-fifty or nix!"

"I don't like girls that are tomboys!" was Bentleigh's retort discourteous, which pretty well expressed his own life conviction. He had thought that would end their relationship just as he thought his unanswered letter of a month ago would do. But Sally had always come back for more, just as she had now.

And history had repeated itself over and over. There were the vacations he had spent mainly with her ever since he came to New York, culminating in the last one a year ago when for a brief time they had seriously considered marrying each other. They probably would have if he had consented to the elopement Sally had advocated.

She had finally halted proceedings by advising him to think it over for awhile.

"You see, Unbenty," she demurred, "this business of marrying's got to be founded on perfect give and take, or it

can't be happy. More than anything else in the world, it ought to be fifty-fifty or not at all. I can never be the woman in the home letting her man support and protect her. Let's think it over awhile and see if it's going to be possible for us to meet on some common ground. I don't think we've really ever met yet right out in the open, the real we, I mean."

Bentleigh had thought it over for almost eleven months, then he had written: "I'm afraid it's no use. I don't believe there is any common ground. Perhaps we'd better not even see each other any more."

When Sally didn't answer that letter he considered it settled.

"And here we are beginning all over again," he told himself as he looked up the route to the Mammoth Cave that evening. It took him some time poring over the city map to untangle West Hampton Street from the snarled web of Greenwich Village. By the time he found it his forebodings over the adventure had increased. And nature lent a hand to give them point. For when he came out of his office building it was raining.

Not a grateful summer shower, mind you. A cold, bitter fall downpour, driving before a gale off the sea. A roistering storm that had started in to make a night of it.

Had he been meeting anybody but Sally, he'd have known better than to expect her to keep an appointment on such a night. But this would just add spice to Sally's evening. She'd be there all the more surely, though not on time, of course. Sally never was on time anywhere, rain or shine. He'd be there, and be there on time, as he always was everywhere, rain or shine.

To get there meant a trip on the Elevated and a walk of several wavering and indefinite blocks. A taxi was out of the question. Just now every cab in sight was occupied. Funny how all the rest of the world but you seems to have corraled every available taxi on a rainy evening.

He was wet quite thoroughly by the time he reached the L station. The covering of the cheap umbrella he bought in the lobby of his building would have made pretty fair mosquito netting. Anyhow the best of umbrellas was about as efficient as a cane in keeping off such a storm.

When he left the L at Bleecker Street the storm was still doing handsomely, thank you. This time he made a serious effort to get a taxi, but only wasted twenty precious minutes, bringing himself perilously near the meeting hour. Nothing left but to foot it.

At any rate, he had no traffic congestion to worry about. An occasional loaded taxi; a bedraggled cat, routed from one shelter and streaking for another; somebody's wrecked umbrella skidding by before the wind—no other signs of animation, not even a police officer. The street was practically his to do what he pleased with.

What a night and place for robbery, murder, and other crimes of first-rate importance, he thought, and grew perceptibly no more cheerful. There was a crime wave being extensively advertised in the best papers these days. Bentleigh remembered that some of the most unattractive incidents had occurred right in this section of the city.

By devious turns he had committed to memory, he came at length to Hampton Street, wherein he was supposed to find that thrice-cursed Mammoth Cave Café. There was no restaurant sign in sight anywhere. Probably this was one of those secret resorts that didn't broadcast its location to the uninitiated.

Another horrible thought that should have occurred to him before! Suppose it was a place that admitted only those vouched for and bearing cards to prove it. Well, he'd worry about that after he got there. Meanwhile, where was that confounded number?

At length he deciphered No. 218 and began counting doors westward. When his calculations reached 310 he investigated and discovered 418. He retraced his steps till he felt sure this time he couldn't be far from his destination. Here the feeble street light showed him a great gaping hole in the ground where several buildings had once stood.

It looked like the jagged cavity from which a giant tooth had been extracted. Great upright steel girders of a coming new

structure bristled from the pit's bottom like root fragments the dentist had overlooked.

Something was wrong! Bentleigh stared into the Stygian abysm as though he expected a gilded lobster palace to materialize out of its depth.

"It's a Mammoth Cave all right," he remarked ironically.

Diagonally across the street glowed feebly the modest show window of a tiny store, the only sign of life in sight. Perhaps he could get some information over there.

It was a fly-blown little hole in the wall. A delicatessen shop full of uneatable eatables, its close air reeking with the mingled odors of stale cheeses, damp humanity, and an oil stove. A half dozen nondescript refugees from the storm eyed Bentleigh suspiciously as he entered.

He addressed a fat, greasy matron behind the counter.

"Can you tell me, please, where No. 310 is?"

An eloquent shrug indicated that English was not understood. He tried the rest of the group with the same result.

"Mimi! Mimi!" bellowed the proprietress.

A mite of a girl appeared from the living quarters. The woman jabbered at her, pointing toward Bentleigh.

"Wot ye want?" the child piped at him.

"Where's No. 310?" he asked the small interpreter.

She interrogated her elders in the foreign tongue, then shook her head.

"What number is this?" he tried again.

"T'ree hundert an' t'irteen," she announced after more consultation.

A cold fear was growing in Bentleigh. Then 310 *must* be about across the street.

"Where's the big restaurant, the Mammoth Cave?"

"Mammot' Cave?" the child echoed disdainfully. "Is torn down. Was right over there."

She pointed through the murky rain-beaten window at the hole in the ground across the street.

Bentleigh laughed sardonically. So that was the appointed reunion for Sally and him after a year's separation—a hole in the ground! He remembered that Sally had learned of the Mammoth from a clipping a year old. Of course it hadn't occurred to either of them to look it up and see if it was still in business.

He peered disconsolately through the glass at the gaping wound in the building line. It was seven o'clock now, a half hour past their appointed meeting time. Sally was never less than half an hour late. Sometimes it was an hour. Thank Heaven, he had a dry place to watch for her.

So he began his vigil, his new friend, the child interpreter, at his side noisily chewing some gum he had bought her, the hangers-on chatting in the rear. He knew they were discussing him and felt more and more self-conscious as the minutes passed.

At length his wrist watch told him it was seven thirty. No Sally yet. Could it be she wasn't coming, after all? Well, he'd wait on. No knowing what had delayed her in a strange city. She mustn't come down here and find him gone.

Then another more horrible thought! Perhaps she had arrived ahead of him and left. Or had something happened to her? He turned and eyed the disreputable group. How would a well-dressed American girl fare among them? One man in particular held his eye—an evil-looking young foreigner, something of a dandy in appearance.

Bentleigh caught the fellow studying him surreptitiously. He wouldn't care to meet that bird alone in a dark street.

Where in the world was Sally?

"Tell me, little girl," he said, stooping to the child, "did you see a young lady around here a little while ago looking for somebody?"

Bentleigh happened to glance at the foreign young man as he spoke. The fellow was leaning toward him, listening alertly. But as he saw Bentleigh's eye upon him he suddenly slumped back indifferently. His face became expressionless again.

"Did you see her?" Bentleigh demanded, and he was sure the fellow had. An uncomprehending shrug, however, was his only reply.

"I saw her," the child broke in importantly. "A pretty lady wid red hair. She stopped over there an' looked round, an'

a man came up an' they talked, an' he took her arm an' pulled her, an' she hit him, an' another man came up an' hit him, an' the other man grabbed her arm an' pulled her crost the street an' into a house."

"Which house? Show me!" Bentleigh demanded excitedly, throwing open the door and rushing out, dragging the suddenly terrified child after him.

"Lemme be," shrieked the child.

There was a clamor and rush from within.

"Quick!" he whispered in the little girl's ear. "Tell me which door he took the lady in. I'll give you a dollar."

He held a bill before her.

"That one," blubbered the child, pointing at a dark doorway. She grabbed the dollar and vanished in the excited group that had followed her out of the store in a hue and cry, the evil-looking young man in the lead.

Bentleigh dodged into the door the child had indicated just as the small mob arrived. In the dark vestibule they jammed as he slipped through the inner door. He looked back and was surprised to note that the young man seemed to be holding them back, haranguing them in a staccato dialect.

It was a foul little hall inside, lit dimly by a flickering gas jet. Four squalid flats opened off it. A rickety stairway led to the next floor.

Bentleigh rapped sharply at the nearest door. He was confronted by a dull-eyed workman.

"I want the young woman you got in here," Bentleigh bluffed fiercely.

Again he was confronted by the uncomprehending shrug. He pushed past the fellow, who was too surprised and overawed to interfere. The tenement dwellers are used to being invaded by peremptory gentlemen all the way from social workers to plainclothes men.

A glance was enough to exonerate the pitifully bare little interior. A mouse could hardly have found hiding place. By now the clamor had brought the other tenants to their doors to confront Bentleigh as he returned to the hallway.

"What you want?" demanded a crabbed woman from the opposite doorway.

Thank Heaven, a speaker of English!

"I want the young woman who was brought in here. Let her go at once."

But the bluff was aimed in the wrong place again, apparently.

"No young woman on this floor," declared the other. "You want de top floor right han' rear. See?"

Bentleigh bounded up the stairs without an instant's hesitation. His blood was up. He saw visions of Sally undergoing torture. His rap at the top floor right hand rear barked his knuckles and nearly burst the door panel.

He heard a faint feminine exclamation of alarm. Was that Sally? Then there was the rumble of a man's voice. The door opened a crack and a swart competent masculine face appeared.

"Wotta ye want?" growled the face.

"The young woman you have in there. Let her go at once and save trouble."

"Wot!" The door sprang open and in a flash Bentleigh found himself in a pitched battle.

As he and his antagonist met he saw over his shoulder the frightened face of a slatternly young woman, not Sally by a long way. The first rush had carried him into the little two-room apartment. He managed to break loose long enough to glance into the other room. Again he had been mistaken. There was no one else in the place. He held up his hand to stop the fight.

"My mistake! Sorry! S—"

The answer was a handsome punch on the jaw.

"I'll mistake ye!" vowed the outraged flat holder, and the fight was on again.

They fought their way out to the landing, where others joined issue against the invader. It was beautiful while it lasted. Bentleigh was seeing red. He was not stopping to pick social equals on which to bestow the results of his gym training. He laid out his first assailant presently, but plenty of others took his place. Twice knives flashed, but he was too quick for them.

He had pummeled his way down two flights of stairs when he heard again the staccato jabber of the evil-faced young man

who had held back the first rabble. Now his foreign speech was interspersed with fluent English. He was evidently a leader in the neighborhood, for the fighting slowed down as he approached.

"You're in wrong, fellow," he whispered as he reached Bentleigh's side. "The skirt ain't here. I'll take ye to her. Beat it quick. The cops'll be here'n a second."

They forced their way to the street to a chorus of demands for "police" in many tongues. A few followed them, but held back under the tongue-lashing of his guide, and the two were alone when they swung around the corner.

A few steps down the block they turned into an alley that led back to the rear of the new building-construction where once had stood the Mammoth Cave. A single light peopled the alley with fearsome shadows and crowded the cavernous new cellar with hobgoblins.

Where a bit of temporary flooring stretched over the girders his guide stepped aside.

"In there, bo. I'll bring the skirt to ye," he whispered.

But Bentleigh had been watching the fellow with the eyes of a cat. He dodged just as the blackjack hissed through the space where his head had been. He caught the fellow's wrist in a jiu-jitsu grip and the weapon fell to the planking. There was lurid flow of whispered profanity.

"Cheese it!" the fellow groaned. "I'm on the level, I tell ye."

"That looks like it!" sneered Bentleigh, poking the blackjack with his toe.

"Aw, I thought ye was goin' to jump me. I'll bring the girl to ye, so help me Gawd."

"Do it double quick or I'll break every bone in your body. Take me to her."

"Listen. I can't do that. I didn't swipe her. I gotta square the gang that's got her. Give me enough coin an' I'll do it. You'll never see her again if ye don't, an' do it quick."

"Prove you're on the level and bring me to the girl and if she's safe I'll give you anything I've got in the world. Otherwise—"

He was interrupted by a creaking plank. A massive form slid out from behind a girder. A ham-like hand fell on the collar of the young man and wrenched him out of Bentleigh's grasp. The other hand of the newcomer thrust a competent-looking revolver under the nose of this prisoner.

"As ye were, young feller, me lad," the newcomer rumbled, swiftly searching the fellow's pockets for weapons and confiscating an automatic.

Then he gave him a thrust that sent him staggering off the planking.

"On yer way about yer nefarious business. Barney the Cop'll gather ye in prisently. I just told him ye started the row 'round in the street to-night."

The young man slunk away and the big fellow turned a grim face on Bentleigh, who stood uncertain whether this was friend or foe.

"So you're Bentleigh!" announced this strange person astoundingly.

Bentleigh was recovering his dignity.

"That happens to be my first name. I don't know how you know it or who you are."

"Me? Oh, I'm the feller that kidnaped the young lady."

Bentleigh started forward with clenched fists. But the big revolver was still in evidence.

"Aisy, boy, aisy! Ye ask how I know yer Bentleigh? Well when the young lady was tackled on the street to-night by this young gentleman we just dismissed she sings out 'Bentleigh! Bentleigh! Help!' Ye didn't happen to be on time, Bentleigh, me boy, an' I was. So I got the gurl."

"If anything's happened to her you'll pay for it, big as you are, gun or no gun," Bentleigh retorted angrily.

"Well spoken, me lad. Well, we'll go see what's happened to the lady an' mebbe we can fix up that ransom money peaceable like."

Full of suspicion and mystification Bentleigh again followed a guide who promised to take him to the elusive Sally. He was expecting signs of treachery at every step.

There was nothing furtive about the actions of this kidnaper. Was he the arch-crook of the section Bentleigh wondered? He had so easily vanquished the other who had seemed to hold leadership.

Now as they came around into Hampton Street again the excited little groups who still loitered in the shelter of hallways peering out at them lowered their voices as he passed.

When they reached the lighter street Bentleigh got a better look at him. He was older than he had seemed at first, a man in upper middle age with a hard bitten face and grizzled hair, yet with humorous lines about the eyes that were almost reassuring.

It was into another tenement he was led, two doors from the one he had raided by mistake, the mistake evidently of the frightened child who had directed him from the store.

His guide opened the first apartment door they came to and motioned him in. Bentleigh found himself in another bare little room, yet this time a room neat and clean and with an air of cheery comfort about it.

Then he stopped and stared in speechless amazement, an amazement made tame by comparison all the other emotions of this amazing evening.

There in a rocking chair sat Sally! Yet it was a Sally he had never met before. The rapt, soft expression on her face was new to him. Sally, the erstwhile tomboy, the independent modern feminist, the scoffing hard-boiled radical, was singing a time-worn old doggerel lullaby to a drowsy baby.

"Sally!" he whispered hoarsely at last.

"Bentleigh!"

She held out her free hand to him and he clutched and held it. He got a full share of the rapt look.

"Don't wake baby!" she whispered. "Isn't he lovely?"

So they remained till the child slept and the big man carried it tenderly to the inner room. Sally jumped to her feet, then seemed to take in his disheveled appearance for the first time.

"Why, Bentleigh! What's happened? You're all torn up and bloody!"

The big man, returning, answered for him.

"The boy's been fightin' everybody in Hampton Street for ye all the evenin', young lady. Somebody tould him the wrong apartment ye'd been kidnaped to an' he wint in an' licked every man in the place, twinty to wan at least it was, an' Tony Ferrugini, the toughest guy in the Village, among 'em. Thin that young skunk that tried to kidnap ye first came up and led him off sayin' he could find ye for him fer a price an' I come along just as Bentleigh here had first licked him and then promised him all the money he had if he'd bring ye to him."

"Why, Bentleigh! You did that for me?"

"And you called me for help, Sally!" Bentleigh accused in his turn.

"An' why shouldn't she?" demanded the big man. "Doesn't a real woman depend on her man fer pertection? An' it's the real woman she is. Here's me daughter I live with, sick an' me gran'-baby frettin' itself with the teeth, and she comes in an smooths it all out. I had gran' good luck wid my kidnapin' this time. She's ransomed herself, me boy, an' I'll leave her to ye an' go out lookin' fer more victims."

The big man disappeared.

"Who is he?" demanded Bentleigh.

"He's the watchman on the new building across the street. Isn't he an old dear? I came along at prompt six thirty, sir, and you weren't on time for once. And wasn't it priceless the place being torn down six months ago? I asked that young thug if he'd seen you and he got insulting. Mr. Hogan, the watchman, heard me and came out of the building in time to save me trouble. He offered me shelter here in his home till you came, and promised to keep watch for you. He must have been on his rounds and missed you at first when you turned up. But isn't it priceless?"

"I think it was priceless, Sally. Seems to me we kind of met each other for the first time to-night, sort of fifty-fifty, didn't we?"

She studied his face for a moment. A rosy blush stole over hers.

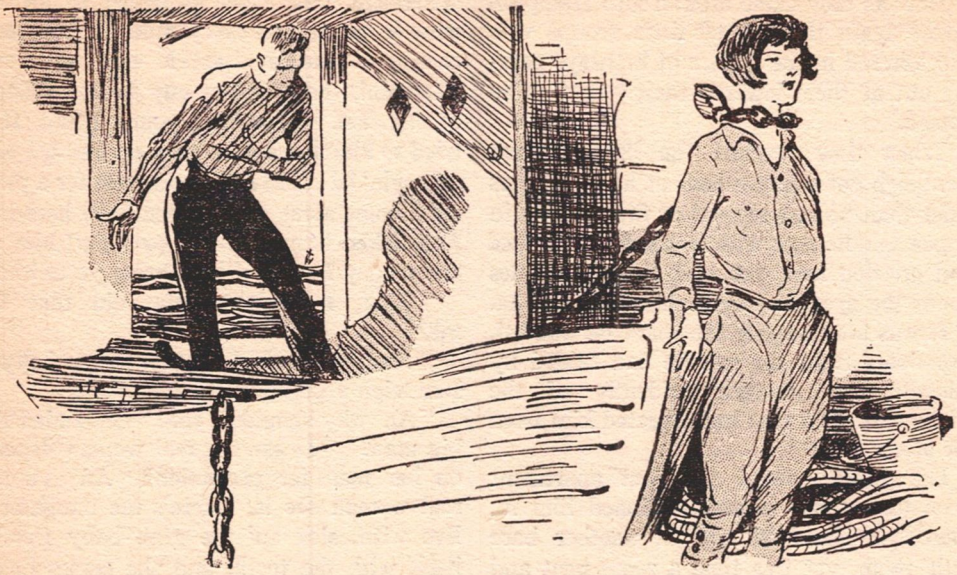
"Yes, Bentleigh," she whispered.

Somehow, without realizing it, he had his arms around her now.

"I'm going to kiss you, Sally."

"Let's make it fifty-fifty," she chuckled as she lifted her face to his.

THE END



Meet the Prince!

By WILSON COLLISON

Author of "The Return of Bill Buddie," etc.

A NOVELETTE IN TWO PARTS—PART II

X.

"I'VE got you now!" he exclaimed in an astonished voice. "The beautiful bobbed-haired blonde!"

"Do you think I'm beautiful?" the voice inquired, with another rippling laugh. "And what a remarkable memory you have for a prince."

"Listen," said Shifty, shaking his head disgustedly; "that prince stuff is all out, so far as I'm concerned. I don't know what the comedy is, but here I am—and if you're having a good time, so am I."

There was a silence then. Shifty remained leaning forward in his chair, with an air of eager expectancy. He decided that there was no use for him to think; thinking would never solve this gigantic enigma: carried out of Allenby's house by a mysterious girl who was wondrously pretty and alluring. If she knew what the object was, he certainly didn't. Why not let it go at that? People who ask too many questions are apt to awaken in a strait-jacket and discover that they've gone insane.

"Have you ever seen his face, Padget?" the voice inquired again, vastly amused.

"That I have not," replied a low, cautious masculine voice.

"Oh, he's just like George Washington," the musical voice murmured gravely.

"Indeed? Where did the prince reign, miss?"

"Where did who rain?" Shifty asked a trifle petulantly.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for July 18.

"Padget, that is a secret," the girlish voice answered. "He was one of the four horsemen in the king's guard."

"How utterly dashing!" the person called Padget uttered in an awed tone. "What will you do with him, miss?"

"What would you do with him, Padget?"

"That is an embarrassing question, miss."

"You needn't answer. But his figure is superb in a purple dressing gown."

"He has a very good form, miss. An excellent waist-line. Indeed, a splendid figure."

"Ah, the man is another *D'Artagnan,* Padget?"

"Who was he, miss—the queen's barber?"

"Certainly not. He was a romantic hero—and I adore romantic heroes," the voice answered laughingly.

Shifty hunched back in the chair and twisted his mouth into a smile. Some one was going to pay for all this misguided humor, he thought grimly.

"Would you like a cigarette, prince?" the girl asked in his ear. Shifty felt a sudden thrill as her warm lips brushed his cheek. For a moment he was unable to make a reply. All the romantic dreams he had stored away in his mind for years bubbled to the surface. He felt that his face was flushed. And in the next instant he was conscious of a smoldering cigarette being placed in his mouth. He took one long, luxurious puff and inhaled deeply.

"Thanks," he said. "What do I do when I get to the end—swallow it?"

The girl whom he could not see laughed deliciously. Every time she laughed Shifty tingled all over. He drew a mental picture of her as she had stood before him on Allenby's porch. She was a beautiful little girl, there was no question of it. Then the appalling, dismaying thought came to him that this might not be the same girl at all. Perhaps Billings had got the stuff printed in the newspapers and a gang of crooks had actually kidnaped him, believing him to be a real prince. They might be holding him for ransom—or hush money on Allenby's part.

"He's thinking, Padget," the voice said.

"Does he, miss?" Padget inquired incredulously.

"Now, listen," Shifty said in a low, confidential voice, leaning forward and talking out of one corner of his mouth, the while the cigarette burned in the other corner, "we could have a real nice chat and enjoy the weather if you'd take this towel away from my eyes and let me see." He searched his mind swiftly for some fine phrase; caught it and smiled. "Beauty should never hide its lure from the eyes of mortal man; beauty which shimmers in the dark cannot be adored."

"Isn't that lovely, Padget?" the girl asked; and Shifty imagined that there was a note of real feeling in her voice. "The man has possibilities."

"Unquestionably," replied Padget, "he is poetically inclined and a man whom women could love."

Shifty was assailed by an almost unconquerable impulse to leap out of the chair and butt that fellow Padget in the pit of the stomach with his head. The chap was so damned humorous, so facetiously bent upon making sport of him. And he supposed, too, that after all, the girl was only looking at him in the same light. But he knew he had to be calm; that was his best weapon in such a position.

He heard some one moving toward him. Then the soft hand was lifted and laid against his cheek. A second later the cigarette was removed from his mouth; the hand touched his lips.

"Kiss my hand," the girl murmured, "as you did this morning, prince." Shifty leaned forward; amazement shot through his mind. Did the girl really think he was a prince?

"Listen," he said calmly, after having barely touched his lips to her fingers, "you're a wonderful girl—but stop kidding me—the prince is dead."

"Are you going back to the beans?" the voice asked him, faintly humorous.

"Back to the what?"

"Back to the crown, I mean," she amended with a laugh.

"Back to the crown is right if I ever get my fists loose," Shifty uttered hoarsely. "Some one will get the crown!"

Silence pervaded the room then. Shifty felt that it was no longer possible for him to conceal his mounting rage. So he hunched back in the chair and lapsed into moody quiet.

Presently he heard a sound which struck his ears like the dull clanking of a heavy chain. And swiftly, before he had time to think or to raise himself out of the chair, something cold and hard descended around his neck. It was icy cold and gave him a violent start. He heard the snapping of something which sounded like a heavy padlock. Then there was silence again. Shifty knew that he couldn't stand up with his legs bound so firmly; he would only fall over on his face, and he disliked to create such an embarrassing spectacle for the eyes of the girl whom he instinctively felt was regarding him.

"Good night, prince," he heard her say suddenly. And he felt the thrilling touch of her hand on his cheek again. "I hope you sleep well—I'll run in and take breakfast with you."

That was all. He heard the swift patter of feet over a board floor; the sound of a door closing. Then silence, deep and full of inexpressible meaning.

The sudden touch of another hand at his feet; the loosening of the ropes. In an instant he was free at the ankles. The hands came up behind his back with incredible swiftness and unfastened the rope there. He flung both hands out before him, jerking them up and down to start the circulation.

The hands were hurriedly unfastening the bandage about his eyes. It slipped away and fell into his lap. A glare of blinding light struck him. He closed his eyes; then opened them, trying to grow accustomed to the brilliancy of the lights in the tiny room.

He leaped from the chair with a cry like that of an enraged wolf; both hands shot out in an effort to grip the tall, thin man who wore the attire of a butler. But with a single bound, the man flung himself backward, and to Shifty's amazement, he was brought up short with a painful jerk at his throat. He reached up and his fingers closed over a heavy log chain, which was padlocked round his neck. His eyes, astonished, glaring, furious, followed the length of the chain. It was fastened to a large green rowboat in one corner of the room with another big padlock. In one brief glance he catalogued everything in the room. It was a boathouse. He had been chained up, like a dog, in a boathouse!

He swung round and stared with malevolent eyes at the man across the room. He had calmly dropped down into a chair and was smoking a cigar, seated beside a little table, which had a tray upon it filled with food and a pot of steaming coffee. He was a droll looking old fellow with a bald head and a slightly red nose and possessed a great dignity which seemed never to be ruffled. He sat looking back at Shifty with eyes which expressed nothing, told nothing. And he was safely out of the enraged young man's iron fists—at a distance where Shifty could not reach him, for the chain would not permit him to go that far.

The man rose and nodded to the table.

"A late supper is served for the prince, sir," he said gravely.

"What the hell!" Shifty snarled, grabbing the heavy chain and shaking it like an infuriated ape.

"This will be your bedroom, sir. The boat has been arranged for comfort, sir. The little door over there opens into a private bath and smoking room. You may smoke in here, if you choose. It is only necessary for you to rattle your chain to get service, sir. You will be provided with every comfort, including cigarettes and good books, sir. On the table over there, you will find some modern novels to amuse you. Personally, I find them a bit tedious and highly immoral, sir. Quite likely they will amuse you, sir."

"Who wrote this act?" Shifty roared, shaking the chain in a paroxysm of rage.

"A lady wishes to detain the prince, sir," Padget murmured, lighting a fresh cigar. "When you grow calm, I will push the table within reach of your hands, sir."

"Push it!" Shifty rasped. "I won't kill you—I'm hungry!"

XI.

HELEN CARLING'S awakening from a sound slumber had been both startling

and rude. The jingling of the telephone on the night table at the head of her bed had brought her sitting upright with wide, half frightened eyes. She was only partly conscious of what she said to Jimmie Allenby. But one thing she knew as she furiously clapped the receiver back upon the hook: Jimmie had either been drinking or he had gone stark, raving mad.

However, as she glanced at the small clock upon the table she was conscious of a certain feeling of trepidation. It was nearly midnight. And what had possessed Jimmie to ring her up at such an hour and shout those silly words at her over the wire?

She got hastily out of bed and put her dressing gown on; glanced at the clock again and then went across the room to the hall door. She opened it a bit and stood listening. Below her, the house seemed strangely silent. And directly across from her own door was the door leading into Jackie's bedchamber. She saw that a faint light shone out under the crack of the door; she wondered if Jackie had returned from the party over at Dickie Weldon's bungalow on the water.

Helen had an odd premonition that something had been going on which she should by all means know. It seemed incredible to her that Jimmie would call her on the telephone at midnight and say such ridiculous things unless he had had some cause. But what?

She supposed that her Aunt Lucie was soundly sleeping in her own room at the far end of the corridor. And there was no use to disturb her. She regretted in this moment that she had not been more diplomatic with Jimmie; hung on long enough to question him, to find out what had stirred him so suddenly to such inane action.

She looked across at Jackie's door again with speculative eyes. *There* was an impossible mixture of the present day flapper and the little dare-devil, always seeking adventure and dangerous sport; that pretty, alluring little blond cousin of hers, Jackie Carling. She remembered that Jackie had scarcely been in the house more than fifteen minutes at any one time since her arrival from Boston yesterday morning. Jackie belonged to a staid old Boston family, but Jackie herself was anything but conventional. She was a veritable little angel for sweetness and a mad little hoyden for playing pranks on unsuspecting people. Helen had a tremendous affection for her, but she frequently became annoyed, too.

With an implacable desire to know whether or not Jackie had come home she crossed the hall and placed her ear to the door. Aunt Lucie had definitely warned Jackie that if she were to spend two weeks here she would have to behave herself and not get into any wild parties or upset the conventions of a carefully conducted household.

There was absolutely no sound in the room. So Helen calmly pushed open the door and entered. And the first thing that met her gaze was Jackie, standing before a mirror vigorously massaging her glorious blond hair. Jackie had slipped off her evening gown—Helen remembered that it had been of a very vivid coloring and a bit daring—and had flung an old gray wool bathrobe about her.

She turned round with a half smile on her very red lips as Helen faced her, closing the door softly at her back.

"Now what the devil are you prowling round about at midnight for?" she inquired with a slight trace of scorn.

"I wanted to see if you were in," Helen said, with a little frown.

"Oh, you did?" Jackie uttered with supreme contempt. "Well, sit down and make yourself at home—I'll be with you in a minute."

Helen moved across and dropped down upon the edge of the bed, cupping her chin in the palm of one hand, watching Jackie with thoughtful, admiring eyes. She was a pretty thing! So vivid, so full of life. Helen ran more to the stately type—an exceedingly beautiful girl, but a trifle cold and calculating—not the sort to be carried off her feet at any time by an overwhelming emotion. But Jackie was a romantic little witch.

Jackie swung round and leaned against the edge of the dressing table nonchalantly. She picked up a cigarette from a tray and

casually lighted it, blowing the thin ring of smoke ceilingward.

"Now listen, old girl," she began in a friendly voice; but Helen made a sudden, deprecatory gesture.

"Why do you call me 'old girl?'" she asked, a little petulantly.

Jackie laughed, frankly amused. With the old robe drawn tightly about her, she had the appearance of a slim, athletic boy of twenty; she was, in fact, twenty-three.

"Because," Jackie murmured through her cigarette smoke, "you're drying up, darling."

"Indeed?" said Helen, testily.

"Exactly," Jackie went on in a confidential manner. "You sit out here in this old house and do the same things every day and every night. Why, you ought to wake up and push yourself into the game and do something exciting. But, of course, you couldn't do that—you're a Carling, and the Carlings have always been so nice."

"Did you have a good time at the party to-night?" Helen asked abruptly.

"Did I have a good time? Oh, boy!" Jackie threw back her head and laughed.

"Sh!" warned Helen, rising quickly and holding up her hand. "You'll waken Aunt Lucie."

"Oh, bother Aunt Lucie!" Jackie exclaimed, candidly bored by the mere mention of the name.

"Did Dickie have a nice crowd?" Helen inquired, dropping back upon the edge of the bed again.

"Oh, pretty fair, pretty fair. You know how they are nowadays—the men are all alike. No pep, no go—no smashing force—just a lot of sticks in dinner jackets. Now, my idea of a man is the sort of boy who socked the taxi driver and rescued you and Jimmie Allenby."

"Hush!" said Helen. "Undoubtedly, he was a nice young man, but, of course, he has no social standing."

"See—there you go!" Jackie tossed out with a shrug of contempt. "You girls are all alike. You have single track minds. You'd rather fall in love with a stick if he had his name in the Blue Book than you would with a real man if he had his name in mud."

Helen bit her underlip and looked distinctly annoyed. She had not quite agreed with Jackie's advanced ideas any more than her Aunt Lucie had agreed with them. The trouble was, though, Jackie was so horribly independent. She had a snug fortune in her own name and no one could prevent her from doing just whatever pleased her fancy. Aunt Lucie had often predicted a disastrous end for the little madcap. She had frequently remarked that in all probability Jackie would wind up by marrying a handsome bricklayer or an uncouth plumber whose appearance was good but whose manners would prove shocking.

"Now, listen, darling," Jackie murmured, walking across toward Helen with her hands upon her hips, the cigarette drooping at a rakish angle between her lips. "For the love of the ancients, don't marry Jimmie—he's a piece of rubber jelly."

"We'll not discuss him!" said Helen.

"Yes, we will!" declared Jackie firmly.

She pounced upon the bed and drew her slender legs up under her, leaning forward looking into Helen's face with an amused smile. "You've been trying to make up your mind ever since you were a little girl whether or not you loved him. Jimmie's a nice boy, but he doesn't just measure up. The idea of a man taking a girl out and not being able to protect her!"

"It wasn't Jimmie's fault," Helen said faintly. "The taxi struck our car and Jimmie got into an argument. You must remember that Jimmie isn't very big."

"There you are!" said Jackie with a triumphant wave of her hand. "Why fall for the little ones. Look about, darling, and wait till the real man comes along."

"Oh, you're so silly," Helen uttered with a sigh. "Always looking for the romantic instead of the practical."

"Why not?" Jackie demanded suddenly and with great emphasis. "What makes the world go round—love? Yes, sir! I want a man that I can look up to. If I'm out walking with him and some fresh boy makes a bust, I want to see my man haul off and sock him for the gong. I'd die with embarrassment if I had a man who'd have to back up and yell for help. Not this little girly!"

Helen's lips parted in a faint smile; an uncertain light flickered in her eyes for a brief instant and vanished. A slight flush crept into her cheeks.

"Have you seen Jimmie since you arrived?" she asked, at length.

"No, and I don't want to see him," Jackie answered grimly. "Jimmie and little I don't agree at all. Every time I look at him I get the idea I'd like to take him by the collar and shake the lining out of his well-fitting clothes."

"Indeed?" said Helen, frowning.

"Indeed is right!" agreed Jackie promptly. She looked straight at Helen and there was a challenging light in her eyes. "I walked over to his house this morning after breakfast."

"Why?" asked Helen quickly, looking startled.

"Oh, I just wanted to talk to Berton, y'know."

"Jimmie's butler?"

"Yes. He's a nice boy. We get along great together."

"Jackie! A butler!"

"He's a good butler, too. Lots of common sense. He thinks the way I do. He's been in Jimmie's family for years and it almost makes him cry to see the way Jimmie carries on."

"Carries on—how?" Helen inquired, mildly interested.

"Oh, trying to buy his way through life. Jimmie thinks that money is everything—and that whatever he wants he can buy it—whether it's a new suit or protection."

Helen didn't grasp this at all. She was beginning to feel frightfully sleepy. She was a methodical sort of girl and led a calm, emotionless sort of existence. She went to bed at a certain hour each night and rose at a certain hour each morning. She took scrupulous care of her complexion and her health, as her appearance at all times clearly indicated.

"You know," Jackie said, flopping over on the bed and kicking her slim, black-stockinged legs up in the air, "the more I see of you the more I'm convinced that you'd make an ideal wife for Jimmie—you just miss being a stick yourself, Helen."

"Indeed!" said Helen, arching her brows. "Thanks for the compliment."

"Don't get peevish," Jackie laughed, sticking her finger into Helen's side gleefully.

"What," asked Helen, a note of undisguised suspicion in her tone, "was your object in going to Jimmie's house this morning?"

"Oh, I always get up rather early, y'know," Jackie said with a careless toss of her head. "I like to bat about the roads in the early morning air with my car."

"Yes," Helen remarked with set lips, "you're going to be killed some day in that awful racing car of yours."

"When I do," Jackie smiled, "write it on my tombstone: 'Here lies a girl who knew what she wanted and went out and got it.'"

Helen shrugged. The conversation was beginning to bore her. It invariably became tedious to talk to Jackie. Her very enthusiasm, her wild, impractical views were terribly tiring. Her rainbows were always sketched in such glaring colors. Jackie always struck the high spots; she freely left the low ones for the more cautious.

"You haven't answered my question," Helen suggested at length, stifling a yawn with one pretty, white hand.

"Oh, that!" said Jackie, stretching her arms high above her head and shaking her blond hair vigorously. "Well, I just wanted to renew old acquaintances. I met Berton in the garden and we had a long talk. He told me that Jimmie was in bed, and I remarked that Jimmie slept most of the time."

"And you went over there just to see the butler?" Helen asked, losing interest.

"Yes, just to see the butler." Jackie jumped up on the bed and bounded high into the air, coming down with a bump. She laughed gleefully. "Oh, boy!" she cried. "What a good time I'm having out here, Helen."

"Hush!" Helen cried, rising from the bed in dismay. "Don't you know that it's after twelve o'clock?"

"I don't punch a time clock," Jackie said contemptuously.

"It's a good thing you have money,"

Helen uttered coldly, drawing her dressing gown about her snugly. "Otherwise, if you were still under the control of your family, I'm afraid they'd put you in a padded cell."

"I could have a good time there!" Jackie cried, leaping from the bed to the floor. "I'd get acquainted with the nut next door and we'd work out a plot to bomb the bat-house."

"An utterly impossible girl!" Helen said, shaking her head.

Jackie scurried across to her dressing table and dropped upon the bench, snapping on the lamp and bending forward to consider her reflection in the mirror.

"Listen, Helen," she called over her shoulder, "I'm an awfully pretty girl."

"You know it," said Helen icily, walking slowly toward the door.

"I'm a beautiful girl," Jackie murmured, studying her face with reflective eyes.

"Are you in love?" Helen asked abruptly, swinging round at the door and surveying Jackie's back with bright, suspicious eyes.

"Who knows?" Jackie laughed. She squirmed round on the bench and deftly crossed her legs.

"God forbid!" Helen uttered in an appalled tone. "It's sure to be some dreadful creature with broad shoulders and the face of a ditch digger."

"Now, listen, you little joy-killer!" Jackie exclaimed, rising from the bench and looking at Helen with indignant eyes. "You girls that kid yourselves in the open and dream in the dark—all bunk. Why have you kept away from Jimmie? What's hurt you the most, when down deep in your heart you actually love the poor fish?"

"We'll not discuss that," said Helen with a shrug of her shoulders.

"You haven't the courage to face your own ideals," Jackie flung back triumphantly. "You bet you haven't. Every girl in this dear old world loves a real he-man, and you know it. If Jimmie had come through and socked that taxi driver you'd have sobbed for joy on his shoulder, but because he took gas and had to let some stranger step in and fight his battle you've given him the gate. You're all fed up with him, darling. If he could come through and show you just once that he had the making of a man you'd marry him and be happy—because it doesn't take much to make girls like you happy."

"Of course you know," said Helen defensively. But her face flushed and Jackie's remarks had obviously touched a tender spot.

"Pinch yourself sometimes," Jackie said, rubbing her lip with the tip of one slim finger. "Pinch yourself and see if you can come out of the ether and admit you're just another fool girl who loves romance and can't find it."

"Good night," Helen uttered faintly, turning round to the door and laying her hand on the knob.

"So long," Jackie answered, her eyes gravely searching Helen's half-turned face. "I'll not be down for breakfast. I'm running out to Dickie's bungalow—he's giving me a breakfast party of welcome to Long Island."

"Oh," said Helen, with renewed interest, "then the man you're in love with is one of Dickie's friends?"

"This was her secret!" Jackie cried gayly, and picked up one of her dainty pumps from the floor and hurling it at Helen. It struck the door with a loud thump. Helen jumped with a startled expression in her eyes, hastily opened the door and passed out into the hall, closing the door after her soundlessly.

Jackie sat down upon the bench at the dressing table and laughed softly. Her eyes sparkled with mirth. Never, never did Helen dream of what was going on behind her back. And never, never could poor, unsuspecting Jimmie Allenby dream of the trouble he had so unwittingly created for himself. Some young men were such asses, Jackie thought, with a shake of her head.

She bent forward and peered at her face in the mirror, now grown very serious. In imagination she fancied that she saw another face staring back at her. It was a very handsome face—the face of a young man with wide, smiling blue eyes and a nice mouth—but there were grim lines about the mouth which told of strength and determination in the heart.

She thought of quaint old Padget with his humorous gray eyes and bald head; and she thought of poor Dickie Weldon, minus his butler, trying to get his own meals merely because Jackie had vamped him into loaning her his servant.

She laughed and laughed. She could hardly restrain her mirth, it was such a dominant part of her nature. Jackie took to humor as a duck takes to water. She had inherited that quality from her father, old J. P. Carling, who had always possessed the knack of getting a laugh out of a funeral or a smile out of the most annoying circumstances. Jackie nodded her head thoughtfully. Yes, J. P.—she had always called her father that—would enjoy this little comedy. And she thought, too, that J. P. would like that young man's face. J. P. had a wholesome contempt for the modern generation of young men, whom he termed mollycoddles and boys with weak hearts and lady-like hands.

She minutely studied her face again in the mirror. She liked the curve of her smooth chin and the red of her smiling lips, the soft, glistening glow of her bobbed hair, the unwavering steadiness of her brown eyes.

She glanced at her wrist watch, which she had not as yet removed.

"Gee!" she murmured. "Me for the bed. I've got a hard day ahead of me."

But before she switched off the lights she scurried across to the clothes press and took out a heavy motoring coat. She reached her hand into one of the pockets and pulled out a broken monocle.

Jackie leaned against the door of the clothes press and laughed in unrestrained joy. This was the most amusing experience of her young life. But—and she closed one eye thoughtfully—there was something about the young man with the smiling blue eyes which gave her cause for considerable pondering. He had a way with him!

XII.

Rufus Piler was a detective not only in name, but in words and deeds. It is unlikely that any one would ever pick him out for a detective merely by his looks.

He was a little man with mild steel gray eyes and looked for all the world like an underpaid bookkeeper or a shipping clerk. Rufus Piler called himself a private investigator and conducted his business without the aid of clerks or other assistants of any kind. Where he had come from no one who had ever employed him ever learned. Piler was a discreetly silent little man who believed that the sphinx was the greatest object in existence to scrupulously emulate. Suffice to say that Rufus was a pretty good sleuth, but studiously avoided the police in his work, for some reason best known to himself.

It was Billings who had persuaded Allenby to get him out of the city at two o'clock in the morning and into the house and the study, where he now sat with his eyes riveted upon the floor as though he had of a sudden gone into a trance.

Billings, after Jimmie had hung up the receiver and shouted that Helen Carling was at home in bed, developed a hunch—and that hunch was that some funny business had been pulled off by some one who ought to be trapped before the business developed into a monopoly.

Allenby's uneasiness had grown to such an extent that he finally gave Billings the right of way, and Billings promptly suggested Rufus Piler, whom he recommended as a great detective and a man who would follow orders and not make any mistakes on the wrong side of the ledger.

Berton had long since retired to his own room, seemingly quite undisturbed by the happenings of the night. Berton's attitude did not strike Allenby as singular, as the butler had always been a grave, emotionless fellow who invariably took life as it was and had no illusions of any sort.

And so it was that Rufus Piler arrived in a wheezing Ford and entered the Allenby house on the heels of Billings, who had gone out to meet him. Outside the fog had completely lifted, and at two in the morning a clear moon was swinging high in the sky, bathing the Allenby grounds in a brilliant flood of light.

The first thing Piler asked for when he arrived was a drink, which Billings courteously passed him from the table in one

corner of the room. Allenby was wide awake and seething with anxiety. By this time he appeared a little haggard, and it was evident that the strange occurrences had made a deep impression upon him. Otherwise it is unlikely that he would ever have consented to make known his business to an outside party, despite the fact that Billings had assured him of the integrity and discretion of one Rufus Piler.

Piler looked up from the rug at length and continued to stare into space for a moment.

"Listen, Piler," Billings said gruffly. "I didn't call you out here to see a glass ball and do the medium stuff. Maybe you see something in the air, but we ain't got nothing to go by."

Piler rubbed his hands and smiled faintly. When he smiled he showed a row of gold teeth.

"Gentlemen," he said in a high, thin voice, "now that you have told me the details of this mystery, I can see but one thing clearly."

"Tell us!" Billings advised hoarsely.

"Yes, yes!" Allenby urged eagerly.

"Unquestionably the man Mr. Allenby took into his home in an effort to utilize as a false prince—unquestionably that man was a clever crook."

"Sure!" Billings said. "I said that from the first. But Mr. Allenby don't want to believe it."

"Well, if it's true—what's to be done?" Allenby asked in a shaking voice. "Why should the man leave such a letter nailed to the veranda, making such a statement when Miss Carling is at home in bed?"

"Unquestionably," Rufus Piler remarked, rising from his chair and rubbing his hands again, "the man was a crook."

"Hell!" Billings snapped. "Ain't you said that five or six times?"

"I wish merely to impress upon you the gravity of the situation, gentlemen," Piler murmured with a gesture.

"Sure, but whata you gonna do, Rufus?" Billings asked impatiently.

"Unquestionably—" Piler began.

"Wait a minute!" Billings bellowed. "Do something else—we got that word on our cuffs."

"Quiet, please," said Piler imperturbably. "I will go on with my statement. Unquestionably, the man is preparing a gigantic shake down—"

"A shake-down?" Allenby asked nervously.

"Yes, sir," Piler replied gravely. "It's always very dangerous to take a stranger into your home, Mr. Allenby. He learns little secrets which you might wish to withhold from the public. Now, the man in question has learned that you are engaged to marry a certain girl. He knows that you had arranged certain stunts to give you publicity and to convince that girl that you were every inch a hero."

"Yes, yes," Allenby uttered huskily.

"Say, everything would have worked out all right if it hadn't been for that bum egg," Billings said disgustedly.

"Exactly," said Piler. "But you must never place your faith in strangers. Now, that young man, being an expert crook, will use the information he has gained to blackmail you, Mr. Allenby."

"How can he blackmail me?" Allenby demanded testily.

"Would you care to have the girl you love and the public in general know what you had planned, sir?"

"No! Good heavens, no!" Allenby exclaimed hastily.

"That's the answer, sir. In a day or two you will receive a letter in which you will be asked to mail a certain sum to a certain address to keep the young man from telling what he has learned."

"Listen, Piler," Billings said grimly; "ain't you a detective?"

"Indeed, yes," answered Piler promptly.

"Then what the hell do you think I got you out here for—just to have you tell us a story. Now, whata you gonna do to stop that baloney from spilling the beans?"

"I will have to work upon cold clews, gentlemen," Piler said thoughtfully.

"Whata you mean, cold clews?" Billings questioned.

"The man is gone. How is one to know where he went to? He left no clew, no information behind him which would give an inkling as to his present abode."

"That's right," Billings grunted. "He

was a pretty slick bird. He never told us a thing about his life."

"He said he was an ex-prize fighter and had been raised on a Kansas farm," Allenby said in a deathlike tone.

"Dear sirs," Piler uttered with a fleeting smile, "that is a favorite story with crooks. You have been duped."

"Don't we know it?" Billings almost shouted, waving one arm up and down furiously. "But how do we get back to the gravy again and smack that turtle for the soup?"

Piler made an odd, throaty sound and swept his eyes about the room.

"Were you alone in this room when you were attacked, Mr. Allenby?" he inquired.

"Yes."

"How many men do you figure were in the crowd?"

"At least ten," Allenby said weakly.

"Listen! You told me five or six," Billings said.

"There must have been ten!" Allenby exclaimed. "It seemed to me that a thousand pair of hands had me."

"The number is unimportant," Piler assured with a gesture of dismissal. "You heard no voices?"

"Not a sound."

"When the lights came on and you fell out of the closet, what did you see?"

"Nothing but this room."

"You found no signs of a struggle, no torn cloth, buttons, bits of hair or—"

"Underwear!" Billings cut in with a grunt of disgust.

"Well—" Allenby began. Then suddenly the handkerchief popped into his mind. He fumbled round in his pocket and took it out with an expression of doubt.

"This is all I found. I picked it up over there on the edge of the rug."

"Ah, a clew!" Piler cried, and sprang forward like a bounding rubber ball, taking the handkerchief from Allenby's hand.

"You didn't say anything to me about that thing," Billings said, suddenly suspicious.

"I forgot it," Allenby answered truthfully enough. He glanced at Piler, who was carefully examining the bit of linen and lace.

"Ah!" Piler murmured, and strode across to the lamp and held the handkerchief under the light, taking a small magnifying glass from his pocket and scrutinizing the initials carefully.

"Whata you see, Piler?" Billings asked eagerly, crossing over and peering down with unbounded curiosity.

"I see here," Piler said in a far-away voice, "a handkerchief which belonged to some female. There are initials on it—'J. C.'"

"Miss Carling's name begins with 'C,'" Allenby said, hurrying over to the two men.

"So it does," Piler answered, still studying the handkerchief. "Unquestionably, there was a woman in this room at the time you were attacked, Mr. Allenby."

"That's impossible!" Allenby cried incredulously. "How could a woman get in here?"

"That I don't know," Piler returned in his high, thin voice. "But it occurs to me, Mr. Allenby, that you are in the hands of a gang of crooks."

"What!" Allenby gasped.

"Yes, sir," Piler reiterated. "This gang is unquestionably led by a woman."

"Ain't that easy?" Billings asked, rubbing his chin. "All you got to do now is find the dame that dropped her handkerchief."

Piler glanced up from the magnifying glass with tragic eyes.

"You've never been a detective, Billings," he said reprovingly.

"I don't see no use," Billings retorted. "Anybody could look through a glass and try to think."

Rufus Piler turned round and rammed the glass and handkerchief into his pocket as though he had reached a momentous decision. He looked at Allenby for a long time in silence. Then he lifted one hand in a gesture of collected thought.

"Mr. Allenby," he said softly, "there is nothing I can do to-night. It's going on half past two. If you will permit me to sleep in the house to-night, I can assure you that by noon to-morrow I will have some definite information for you."

"Plenty of room," Allenby said a trifle

eagerly. "I'm anxious to find out what's been going on here. To-morrow I'll run over and see Miss Carling—ask her what she knows about the thing."

Piler bowed and stifled a yawn. "I think," he said, rubbing his hands energetically, "that I can follow this handkerchief and locate the owner—which will swiftly lead to the seat of the trouble."

"Listen; I got to sleep here, too, Mr. Allenby," Billings said, looking at his watch. "I can't get back to town at this hour, and I got a hunch you'll need me to-morrow."

"All right," Allenby said. "I'll show both of you to your rooms. Berton is in bed."

"I'm glad you called me in, gentlemen," Piler murmured with a fleeting smile.

And neither Allenby nor Billings saw the quick, furtive look he shot about the room, nor had they noticed the strange way in which Rufus Piler's eyes had lingered upon the large diamond ring which Allenby wore upon his finger. He followed out of the room with grave, thoughtful eyes.

XIII.

Shifty Sheffield Cargon sat on the edge of the large green rowboat and watched with puzzled eyes the morning sunlight streaming in cheerfully and brightly through an open window directly across from him. Nothing had happened to Shifty in his whole life to so perplex, astound, and annoy him as did this inexplicable thing which had descended upon him out of a foggy night.

He remembered that the gentleman called Padget had last night pushed the table over for him to get his hands on the tray and the food and steaming hot coffee. He also remembered that after he had finished eating, Padget had cautiously recovered the table and had carried the tray off, not to return during the night.

Until three in the morning Shifty had paced about the room like a caged lion, the heavy log chain trailing after him with an irritating clank. He was a prisoner, no doubt of that. No human hand was strong enough to break this chain; it was fastened about his neck in a manner which formed a neat collar, loose enough for comfort, but too snug-fitting to be slipped over the head.

After having examined everything in the rather roughly furnished little room, he had dropped down upon the edge of the rowboat to discover that it had been converted into a neat bed, with blankets and several pillows. All night long he had heard the booming of fog horns and the clanging of ships' bells, and he knew that this boathouse must be at the very edge of the water.

Eventually he decided that the whole thing was beyond him. Once he wondered if he hadn't fallen into the hands of a gang of crooks who might have imagined that he was a real prince. That thought had occurred to him last night, too. But what the devil was the girl doing—that same pretty girl with the blond bobbed hair? Then he was forced to admit that he was not at all sure it was the same girl—only the voice, the laugh— Hopelessly he finally gave up and had tumbled back into the boat. He supposed at some hour during the troubled night he had fallen to sleep. At any rate, here he was again, wide awake—and it was morning.

He jumped up from the edge of the boat and cast a hurried glance about the room. The chain rattled behind him noisily, and with a grunt of rage Shifty caught it up and shook it furiously. Damn crazy, this business! Some fool chaining a man up for no reason that he could understand.

Shifty, in his violent rage, turned deathly pale. The joke had worn off, so far as he was concerned. He turned back across the room. Some one had been thoughtful enough to hang a mirror upon the wall. He caught a glimpse of his face in it, and the first thing that struck him was the appalling thought that he was a sight. He certainly needed a shave.

He was still wearing the gray striped trousers, with their knifelike edges, which Allenby had supplied him for his princely rôle. He ran his hands over his coat and discovered that it was torn in several places. He had got that last night in the struggle with his unknown captors. The collar of

his silk shirt was badly torn and he reached up and tore it off, turning the neckband in neatly.

Well, what was the outcome to be? The silence in which Shifty stood at this moment had the suggestion of a conflict to come, a good fight or a clash of wills. Of course, Shifty instinctively felt that he was placed at a singular disadvantage, because he did not know what it was all about, and the other party knew. He laughed bitterly and told himself for the hundredth time that he had been an awful fool to enter into that bunk game with Allenby and the enthusiastic press agent. And it suddenly occurred to him that possibly they had had something to do with this. It was not unlikely that both Billings and Allenby had used him as a dupe to carry out some wild idea of publicity tucked away in the effervescent mind of the eager spinner of press yarns.

One thing he knew: he was a prisoner. There was no chance for him to get out of this chain unless some one unfastened the padlock. But, thought Shifty, with a wry sense of humor, why should he worry? If they fed him and provided him a place to sleep, good enough. He was a young man forced to earn his own living—and if some fool had any reason for wanting to keep him chained up, thus providing him with food and shelter, well and good.

He admitted that he was going to get tired of this ball and chain idea after another five or six hours—but until that time came he figured he might just as well amuse himself and be contented the best way he could. Shifty had a sane, reasoning sort of mind—but there was no reason to this wild game. So how could he work out the motive for it? He couldn't! Why not stop thinking?

The chain was long enough to permit him to get over to the window, but cleverly enough it ended there, and there was no chance for him to crawl through and attract some one's attention.

He grinned when the view out of the window met his gaze. It was a broad expanse of the Sound, rippling under the morning sunlight, dotted here and there with boats and barges.

"They ought to have sent me to Blackwell's Island," he chuckled.

He turned round and rested his elbows in the window which was rather low. He would have liked to have a cigarette. And with the desire the realization came in the form of Padget, who came through a door on his right, smoking a cigar and holding a small tray which had a box of cigarettes on it.

"Good morning, sir," said Padget calmly, and walked slowly over and placed the tray upon the table. "Will you have a cigarette, sir?"

"Well, I should say so!" Shifty said with rare good humor, moving over to the table with eager fingers. Padget shoved the table within reach of his hands and as quickly stepped discreetly beyond range. "You needn't dodge me, kid," Shifty grinned, taking a cigarette out of the box and picking up a match from the tray. "I feel fine this morning, and I know where I stand."

"Very good, sir," Padget replied with a profound bow. "It is a lovely morning."

"Oh, it's a wonder," Shifty laughed. "When does the band start again?"

"What band, sir?"

"The girl—the lady—the cave baby that carries them off and chains them," Shifty informed with a wave of the hand.

"Ah," murmured Padget. "If you will step into the little room, sir, you will find a nice bathtub and all the luxuries necessary for a complete shave, sir."

"Now, how the—" Shifty checked himself. No, it would never do to lapse into the jargon of the prize ring again. He had been elevated; some one had thought him valuable enough to kidnap and chain up for safe keeping. "Well, now, how do you think I'm going to take a bath with a log chain round my neck?"

"You will not drown, sir. I have fixed a nail above the tub for you to hang the chain on, so that it will not annoy you as you work, sir."

Shifty laughed. He shook his head and his eyes were faintly humorous. Padget was studying him covertly as though he were mentally weighing the young man's attitude toward certain things to come.

And Padget ungrudgingly admitted to himself that here was a superb looking young man—a young man who had every appearance of a perfect gentleman.

"Of course," said Shifty gravely, "if the queen's going to visit me, I'll have to take a bath and get shaved."

"It would be most desirable, sir," Padget agreed, the shadow of a smile hovering about his lips. "And after you have arranged your toilet I will provide you with breakfast, sir."

"Great!" said Shifty with unbridled enthusiasm. "If there's anything I like in the morning after a hard night it's a good breakfast."

"Do you drink, sir?" Padget inquired solicitously.

"No, sir!" Shifty answered promptly. "None of that stuff for me. I've got a body, man, and I don't take any chances on destroying it."

Padget considered this last remark seriously and in silence, the while he ran his eyes over the body in question. It was indeed, he thought, a magnificent specimen of young manhood. In his mind's eye he could picture the smooth flow of muscles beneath the tight-fitting coat the young man wore with considerable grace.

"How long do I wear this collar?" Shifty asked.

"That I cannot say, sir."

"Where's the girl?"

"What girl, sir?"

"The *one*—the beautiful one who brought me here."

"And how do you know she is beautiful, sir?"

"Ask me!" Shifty laughed and took hold of the chain, rattling it, highly amused.

"The lady in question," said Padget stiffly, "is not here at the present time."

"Will she drop in this morning to see me?" Shifty inquired, gently rubbing the stubble on his face.

"That I cannot say, sir."

"Listen, governor—"

"I have never been governor, sir."

"Listen, brother; I'd like to write a note. Will you get me a sheet of paper and a lead pencil?" Shifty smiled and moved with deliberate slowness toward Padget, who quietly but steadily backed away out of reach.

"It is my duty not to let you write notes, sir," Padget said, gravely surveying Shifty at a safe distance.

"I've got to do it!" Shifty shot out a trifle petulantly. "This is a nutty thing to do to a man—haul him out of a house and rush him through the night and chuck him into a can with a chain round his neck. I've got to write a note to Mr. Allenby."

"That will not be possible, sir."

"You want to keep me sealed in the jar, I guess."

Shifty took a long pull upon his cigarette, shrugged, turned his back upon Padget, stood looking through the window for an instant in thoughtful silence, then swung about again and began rubbing his face with his fingers.

"Just what's the idea?" he asked curiously.

"What idea, sir?" Padget asked innocently.

"Keeping me roped up."

"There is no real idea behind it, sir—it's just an experiment."

"That's a joke. Let's laugh together," Shifty remarked scornfully. "But, listen; I'll slip you some real information. If this is a gang of crooks that have me snagged, they're all wrong."

"Without a doubt they are, sir," Padget agreed with a faint smile.

"Do you know who I am?" Shifty inquired with a contemptuous laugh.

"Yes, sir—who are you?" Padget said solemnly.

"This is a real crowd for kidding!" Shifty snapped, getting a trifle ruffled. "Well, I'm no prince."

"Who said you were, sir?"

"Then what do you want with me?" Shifty demanded fiercely, walking toward Padget as far as the chain would permit.

"I don't want you, sir—she does."

"Who's she?"

"Ask her, sir."

"Now, look here," Shifty said, trying valiantly to keep his mounting temper checked; "maybe this is a lot of fun for some one, but you know I'm a business man and ought to get back to town."

"Just what is your business, sir?" asked Padget politely.

"If I told you, you'd know, wouldn't you?" Shifty half snarled, throwing his smoldering cigarette on the floor and grinding it out furiously with his heel.

"You must not throw cigarettes on the floor, sir," Padget warned, a note of distress in his voice.

"If I had this chain off my neck I'd throw you on the floor!" Shifty roared.

"I'm sure you would, sir," Padget returned, so utterly calm that it served only to incense Shifty.

"I'll tell you another thing," Shifty rasped, pointing his finger at Padget grimly; "if that girl's responsible for this, I'll make her sorry. Girl or no girl, I'll treat her rough."

"Indeed, sir?" Padget uttered away down in his throat, as though the words had been forced out with a chuckle of amusement.

"You can bet your sweet life!" Shifty growled. "What have I ever done to any one to be mauled round like this. Give me a chance! Take the chain off my neck and call in the crowd—if I can't clean out the house in ten minutes, you can put the chain back on and I'll wear it for life."

"You appear to be a fighter, sir."

"That's my business!" Shifty hurled at him with a harsh laugh. "This bunk of tying a man up so he can't fight!"

"Will you go to your bath now, sir?"

"Bath!" Shifty swung round and jerked himself over to the window; looked out at the Sound flowing like silver under the sunlight; leaped back to the table and snatched up another cigarette, lighting it. "If I ever get my hands on that girl I'm going to kill her!" he snarled.

"How cruel of you, prince!" cried a voice gayly. Shifty turned so suddenly that his foot struck the small table and knocked it over with a crash. Standing in the open doorway, with a smile of triumph and amusement mingled into one single expression of absolute joy, was the girl with the bobbed blond hair!

She wore a pair of soft corduroy riding trousers and tan boots and her perfect white throat rose out of a gray silk shirt with a soft collar, which was unbuttoned. Her face was flushed and her eyes sparkled like diamonds in the ray of sunlight streaking in across the room. Her lips were parted in a smile and Shifty was conscious of the fact that it was the prettiest mouth in the world—at least, the prettiest one he had ever seen. She was as fresh and as vivid as a breath of flower-laden wind. Everything about her exuded life, spirit, pep, dash and go.

"Here I am!" she cried, waving one hand at him with a mocking little gesture. "I'm the girl you're looking for—will you kill me now or later?"

Shifty remained motionless, silent, surveying her with eyes which had of a sudden become cool and steady. He wanted to fill his whole vision with this glorious picture. He drew himself erect, to his full height, which was exceedingly formidable, and gazed at her soberly, as though he were deftly considering in his own mind what attitude he should assume toward this pert, sprightly little beauty with the glowing brown eyes. And a sudden thought came to him; it came to him swiftly and unerringly as such thoughts are apt to come to the mind of a quick-witted young man. Shifty Cargon knew human nature pretty well. Although he was not particularly familiar with the feminine complex, he had had some experience with girls—and he thought he had at least a vague idea of their little foibles.

This, then, was the guiding hand which held the reins of the enshrouding mystery. Here was the girl who, for some intangible reason, had had him carried out of Allenby's house and chained up like a puppy in an old boathouse. Shifty had read a bit of the modern flapper and of the intoxicating wine of youth—rich youth. Was this girl, then, one of those flappers who were forever seeking sport and adventure at the expense of others' comfort? Why had she chosen him for her prank, if it was a prank?

"Ah!" said Shifty softly, a swift smile streaking across his face which a moment ago had looked very grim and cloudy. "This is the life."

"Are you really going to kill me?" she asked, walking toward him gravely, one hand held out in mock pleading.

"Hell, no!" said Shifty contemptuously. "I'm going to take a bath." With which he turned his broad back upon her and strode, with a precise and exaggeratedly elegant stride, toward the door beyond which, according to Padget, lay the bathroom. The chain clanked behind him, but he continued his march until he had reached the door. Where he turned, one hand upon the knob, and bowed with thorough politeness.

"This is a pleasure," he said seriously, "to be held by a lovely girl, to be allowed to take a bath with a log chain."

He disappeared within the room, dragging the chain in after him. Jackie looked furtively at Padget, but Padget's face was inscrutable; only his eyes smiled. Jackie looked just a little puzzled.

"Has he been like that right along, Padget?" she asked incredulously. "Hasn't he raved?"

"My word, miss!" Padget exclaimed, holding up one hand defensively. "You should have heard him. The only thing I ask, miss, is that if you decide to remove the chain from his neck, permit me to get a start of at least two miles."

Jackie didn't laugh. A new thought had entered her mind. She was really considering the advisability of taking the chain from about her prisoner's neck.

The sound of running water came to her ears. Then the clanking of the chain, followed by a great splashing and the blithe whistling of a new jazz tune. This abruptly ceased and Shifty began to sing in a really fine barytone:

"A blonde in bond, oh, boy!
I like that kind, they never mind, they give you
Some hell with the joy.
They're never sad, not really bad, but, say!
I'd like to know, here below, just how they got that way."

"He has a lovely voice, Padget!" Jackie murmured in all seriousness.

"Yes," said Padget somberly, shaking his head, "he belongs in a cage at the zoo."

XIV.

When Mr. Cargon emerged from the bathroom something more than thirty minutes later, he was as handsome a young man as has ever met the gaze of adoring feminine eyes. He had found an amazing array of toilet articles laid out for his use in that room and he had used them with considerable skill.

He entered the room where he had left the girl to find it vacant. But upon the same little table was a tray filled with an inviting breakfast and straight to this went Shifty and sat down, lighting a cigarette coolly. He had done a vast amount of thinking in the seclusion of the tub, with the chain suspended upon the conveniently placed nail above it. He had, in fact, reached a certain conclusion which made him grin whenever he thought of it. It was neither a very desperate conclusion nor was it a practical one; it was merely embroidered with a certain trimming of fun and revenge.

Shifty lifted the coffeepot and was in the act of pouring himself a cup of the steaming beverage when he noted, not without interest, that the tray had been arranged for two. And as he noticed this, the girl entered the room through another door and stood looking at him with smiling eyes.

"I'm breakfasting with you, you know," she said solemnly.

"It's a pleasure," Shifty said; and rose, bowing and drawing out a chair from the table for her to sit in. This movement unquestionably startled Jackie, for she stared at him a moment in frank astonishment.

"Where," she said, pursing her lips, "did you learn all the little tricks of good form?"

"Queen," said Shifty sedately, "I was the sheik of Oriole, Kansas, before I was given the throne."

Jackie didn't laugh; she didn't even smile. She walked slowly across and dropped into the chair, which Shifty carefully adjusted for her, after which he sat down and poured her a cup of coffee.

"Were you born in Kansas?" she asked, with a little smile.

"Yes," said Shifty carelessly. "Born in Kansas, never knocked out in New York and chained up on Long Island."

Jackie threw back her head and laughed

deliciously. Shifty lowered his coffee cup and looked at her with frankly admiring eyes.

"Do you know that I know who you are?" she inquired, tapping her red lips with her coffee spoon.

"Well, I hope that somebody knows who I am," Shifty answered with a wave of his hand; after which he took up the creamer and glanced at her.

"Cream in the soup?" he asked with a grin.

"A little, please."

"There you are. Sugar?"

"Two lumps."

"There you are. Now let's get down to business—I'm hungry."

Jackie laughed again; she took up a piece of toast and nibbled at it, watching Shifty with half-veiled eyes.

"Do you know who I am?" she asked with a quaint little frown.

"What does it matter?" Shifty said gallantly. "It's enough to know that you are beautiful—and dining with me."

"Oh!" said Jackie; and laughed. But her eyes continued to search his face. "You're a gentleman by instinct and a prize fighter by desire."

"How did you know I was a prize fighter?" Shifty asked suddenly, lowering his coffee cup in unfeigned surprise.

The girl looked at him coolly, amusement written large in her eyes. She picked up her coffee cup; smiled at him over the edge of it.

"Oh, I don't know," she said. "I just imagined it."

"Look here," Shifty uttered, leaning across the table and pointing a finger at her grimly, "you didn't guess anything of the kind. Now what's the game?"

"What game?" she inquired whimsically.

"This business of chaining me up," said Shifty shortly.

"Oh, that?" she returned, lowering her coffee cup and slipping back in her chair with thoughtful eyes. "What would you do if I took the chain off your neck?"

"Well, it would be a d—I mean, a lot more comfortable!"

"You were about to swear," she chided him.

"Yes, I was." Shifty smiled and drained his coffee cup and promptly refilled it. "This is what I call a left-handed trick—grabbing a fellow in the dark and not letting him know what the thing's about."

"Have you any idea at all why I have captured you?" she asked, lifting one hand and running it through her glorious blond hair.

"No," Shifty replied, shaking his head. "I've heard of men grabbing the beautiful ones and carrying them off to their caves—but this is a new one on me."

"That's exactly what I believe in," Jackie said with a sudden laugh. "Something new all the time in an old world. Isn't that funny?"

"Should we laugh?" Shifty asked sarcastically, a bit of color coming into his cheeks. Deep down inside him the fire of anger was beginning to smolder again. No matter how lovely this girl was, she had played a trick on him—she was obviously deriving a good deal of pleasure from his predicament.

"Of course," she said, "if I explained it to you it might spoil the party."

Shifty closed his eyes for an instant and twisted his mouth. Jackie didn't know what he was thinking of—but she perceived that he was thinking. Which Shifty undoubtedly was.

"How did you get onto Mr. Allenby's porch yesterday morning?" he asked, opening his eyes and looking at her critically.

"Who wants to know?"

"I do. Allenby and his butler got me all mixed up—they tried to tell me I didn't know a beautiful girl from an ugly one," Shifty said with a grin.

Jackie laughed. "Well," she said, "what happened?"

"Nothing happened. You told me you were Allenby's sister—and Allenby told me you were Berton's niece—and when the niece came in, it wasn't you."

"How confusing," Jackie said gravely, taking up another piece of toast and breaking it into bits.

"Not for me!" Shifty returned with grim conviction. "I never forget a face."

She bent forward across the table abruptly and looked straight into his eyes for a

moment in silence. Shifty returned her glance unwaveringly.

"Are you married?" Jackie asked so seriously that Shifty slumped back in his chair and laughed.

"Not yet," he said.

"Have you ever been in love?"

"I haven't had time."

"That's no excuse."

"It is for me. I work for a living."

Jackie lapsed into silence then. But she didn't take her eyes away from Shifty's face. She was studying him with a frankness which caused him no embarrassment, but it perplexed him a trifle. He had come to the conclusion that she wasn't going to answer any questions—give him any information, enlighten him as to why he had been tied up.

"Where's our friend Padget?" he asked, turning his head and looking about the room, suddenly conscious that the man was not about.

"I sent him away. He went out for a walk."

"Then we're alone?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Oh, nothing." Shifty had finished his breakfast and he considered it a very light breakfast, but he disliked to complain. He took up the box of cigarettes and extended it to the girl courteously. She shook her head. Shifty slowly took one of the cigarettes out and lighted it. Then he yawned and excused himself.

"You seem to be bored," she said.

"Well, I'm a real active little fellow," Shifty remarked casually, "and it's going to be hard on me, this being chained."

"What would you do if I took the chain off?" she asked suddenly.

"What am I expected to do?" he countered cautiously.

"Oh, don't get anxious!" Jackie laughed. "Because I'm not going to take it off."

"Is your name really—let me see—" Shifty pondered. "Oh, yes—Jackie—that's what you said yesterday morning. Is that your name or just a cover?"

"Maybe it is and maybe it isn't," the girl replied with a little frown.

"Now, listen," said Shifty in a confidential manner, removing the cigarette from between his lips and leaning across the table. With a swift and totally unexpected movement he caught both the girl's hands in one of his own lean, powerful ones and held them in a firm grip. She uttered a startled gasp; tried to draw her hands away; looked at him with a strange light in her eyes; sat motionless for an instant; then tried to jerk free. But she was utterly powerless in that strong hand.

"Stop that!" she said sharply.

"Stop what?" he asked with a laugh.

"Let go of my hands!"

"Try to get away," he shot across at her grimly.

"You—oh, stop it!" she cried.

"Now what's the idea of all this bunk?" he demanded, a little harshly.

"I'll not tell you!"

"You think this is funny, having ten or fifteen men grab a big, husky fellow like me and putting a chain round my neck?"

"How do you know there were ten or fifteen men?" she asked.

"It would take at least ten to get rid of me," he said, a note of pride in his voice.

"You hate yourself, don't you?"

"Well, I know my strength," he answered with a smile.

"So do I," she said plaintively. "You're hurting my hands."

"Now, listen," Shifty growled across at her, "don't play the tearful woman stuff with me. Whatever your idea was in doing this comedy act, the fun is all off for me. I've got to get out of here."

"Try!" she fired back at him, her eyes flashing.

"I intend to. I've got to get back to Allenby's house and find out if he's still on earth. He hired me in good faith and I'll bet he thinks I'm a bum that walked out with all the silverware."

"Let go of my hands!" she cried again.

"Where's the key for this barn door lock you got on my neck?" he rasped, tightening his hold on her.

"Find it if you can!"

"You're a nice, sweet little girl," Shifty said gravely, looking into her eyes, "and I'd hate to hurt you."

"As though you dared!" she flamed. Color mounted to her cheeks; her lips were

parted; she was breathing hard. "It was silly of me to come near you."

"You bet it was! Never get close to a mean dog—he might bite."

Shifty rose suddenly to his feet; kicked his chair over backward, swung round the table, still holding her in a tight grip. He bent down and with one swift jerk, pulled her to her feet.

She flung back her head with a gasp. "Don't you dare kiss me!" she uttered huskily.

"Where'd you get the idea I was going to kiss you?" he asked contemptuously. "I'm a gentleman."

"Oh, you are!" she flared. She looked up into his eyes; they were grim and hard, bright as steel. "I suppose you never stole a kiss in your life, Mr. Cargon!"

"No. I have them given to me," he said.

"You do love yourself!" she uttered. "Let me go!"

"Where's the key for the lock?"

"I'll never tell."

"Yes, you will."

"Are you threatening me?"

"No, I'm tipping you off."

"All I have to do is scream," she said.

"You wouldn't scream. Not you! You've got nerve. You never screamed in your life. You'd be my idea of a real girl if you weren't so fresh."

"Fresh! Why, am I fresh?"

"Ask yourself; you know. Where's the key."

His iron fingers tightened round her wrists. She uttered a stifled cry of pain; bit her lip, but looked up at him fearlessly.

"You're a real cave man, aren't you?" she whispered through set lips. "You'd actually kill a girl!"

"If you don't give me the key to this chain, I'll kill you!" he said tensely, not meaning a word of it.

"Go on! I don't mind having a real man kill me!" she cried furiously.

Shifty turned his head, swept the room with his eyes, listened for a brief moment; then, with a lightninglike movement, he flung one arm about the girl and with his other hand swiftly reached into the pocket of her riding trousers.

"Stop that! Stop!" she stormed, fighting like a tigress to free herself. But she was quite as helpless as a baby in that one encircling arm. It gripped her like a steel trap; her fingers dug into the hard muscles and were withdrawn with a murmur of pain. His arm was so hard that it hurt to dig into it.

"You're strong! You're strong as a horse!" she whispered huskily. "You could kill a woman with one finger."

"If I'm hurting you, I'm sorry," he snapped in her ear. "I mean business. I don't allow any human being to chain me up like a goat." He swiftly went through the other pocket; withdrew his hand with a cry of triumph, his fingers grasping the key.

"Here's the key. Unlock that thing!" he commanded.

"You can't make me!" she shot back fiercely.

"All right!" He swung her to one side, still retaining his hold. She fought a little, then relaxed, grew limp for an instant, only to begin fighting again.

Shifty began to fumble round with his one free hand. It was an annoying task. Every time he pulled the lock down into a position where he might slip the key into it, the girl gave him a violent jerk, twisting the chain round so that the lock went back of his neck again. Shifty merely gritted his teeth and held on to her; never once did he swear. He just continued his maneuvering with grim determination.

In one chance shot he got it. The key slipped into the lock; he left it there and paused for an instant to swing the girl round to his other side, so that he might use his right hand. He looked down at her, and she was panting and breathless, her face flooded with a riotous color. Her eyes were like glowing coals. Shifty thought that she was gorgeously pretty in this moment of struggle.

The lock unsnapped, fell to the floor; the chain, loosened, went clanking down after it.

With a swift movement Shifty bent over and caught up the lock and chain. And then, quite before she had any inkling of his intention, he flung the chain round her

neck, made a neat collar of it, and snapped the lock as she came to a realization of his act with a startled cry.

"You—you beast!" she cried.

Shifty released her; stepped back with a smile of utter triumph upon his face, a light of amusement in his eyes.

"How's that?" he asked. "How do you like the collar?"

For one long moment she stared straight at him. Her face turned white only to flush again with that riotous color.

What a pretty thing she was, Shifty thought, conscious of the same odd thrill which had stirred him the first time he had seen her. She was as vibrant as some wild animal at bay. She made no sound, no outcry—just stood there staring at him with those two bright, brown eyes. She was breathing hard from the struggle. Her gray silk dress had been torn open at the neck.

"I should have known you'd do something like this," she said at length, half bitterly. "Men like you aren't easily conquered."

"What do you think I ought to do with you, now that I've got you all chained up and fighting mad?" Shifty asked whimsically, rubbing his chin reflectively.

She glared at him. "Of course you know you can't keep me this way!" she hurled at him furiously. "Some one will come out and find me."

Before Shifty could find a convincing answer to that, the door behind him opened and Padget walked in, his arms filled with groceries. He paused just inside the doorway, not for the moment comprehending the scene.

And strangely enough, Jackie did not call to him.

"Welcome to our city!" Shifty yelled; and with a leap he went across the room. Padget dropped the packages and cans with a shrill cry of dismay and fright. He shot back through the door like a ball being hurled from a cannon. But he was not quick enough for Shifty, who moved with the speed of an express train.

Two strong hands shot out and grasped Padget by his coat-tail. He was jerked back with painful abruptness into the arms of the tall young man.

"Don't hit me, sir!" Padget implored, shivering in Shifty's grasp.

"If you make one bum move," Shifty snarled with well-feigned fierceness, "I'll kill you!"

"Oh, sir," Padget half shrieked, "I'm not ready to die, sir!"

Shifty took a firm grasp upon Padget's collar and marched him from the door, after kicking it shut, straight across toward the girl.

"Don't you dare talk, Padget!" she cried. "Don't you dare tell anything!"

"Oh, miss," Padget moaned, "I told you this man belonged in the zoo."

Silently and deftly Shifty took up the chain, making another collar in it, about three feet from where the girl stood, and dropped it over Padget's head, drawing it up around his neck. Then he turned and looked about for something with which to fasten it. He spied a piece of heavy wire fastened to one end of the rowboat, and, with a grin, he dragged both Padget and the girl across. Neither of them said a word. Shifty was conscious of her burning eyes upon his back, but he ignored her completely. He was a little amazed, though, that she didn't make more fuss over this sudden switching of positions. He mentally assured himself that any other girl would have gone into wild hysterics. But not this one! She was a game little sport.

He twisted off a piece of the heavy wire and carefully fastened the links of the chain together with it round Padget's neck, twisting and tightening the wire so that he knew Padget could never work it loose with his own fingers.

Then he stepped back and surveyed them with an exultant and a victorious smile.

"This is a pleasure," he said with a bow of profound exaggeration. "I'm going to have a real good time."

Padget glanced at Jackie with worried eyes; but she was not looking at him. She was watching Shifty's face, and there was an odd light reflected in the depths of her two brown orbs.

XV.

SHIFTY CARGON, with the heart of an adventurer, the fists of a prize fighter, and

the soul of a gentleman, walked out along a narrow, rickety old dock and sat down on the very edge of it, lighting a cigarette and swinging his legs to and fro in lazy contentment. Behind him lay the boathouse wherein were safely chained one very pretty girl and one very much frightened man by the name of Padget. Before him the Sound stretched in the morning sunlight.

Shifty was thinking hard. He was considering what he really ought to do, now that he had so neatly turned the tables on the girl who had, for some reason still unknown, captured him and had him dragged out of Allenby's house. The trouble was, every time Shifty thought of the girl he unconsciously closed his eyes and tingled all over. At any rate, he was in a gay mood. Some one had started out to have a lot of fun with him, and he was getting all the joy out of it himself.

He was uncertain as to whether or not he should return to Allenby's house, providing he could find the way back. He had not the slightest idea of where he was. But one thing occurred to him: if Allenby and Billings had had anything to do with this little joke, they would at this moment be in a highly worried state if they knew what he had done. Let them wait and wonder. Let nature take its course; let events shape themselves without his aid.

He looked down at the water and began to whistle blithely. He wished that he had a bathing suit; it was a little warm this morning, and the water looked very inviting. Now he was thinking again, confound it! Who the devil was that girl? And why should she be concerned with such a mysterious venture—kidnaping him, Shifty Cargon, who possessed not a dime to his name and no occupation other than the futile work of attempting to work out some reason for all this crazy stuff he had been plunged into within the past twenty-four hours.

There was the girl again, right before his eyes, her red lips smiling, her brown eyes surveying him with a flicker of amusement.

He suddenly shook his head and laughed. "Gee," he said softly, "I've got to be careful. I got a hunch I'm getting kind of crazy about that girl."

He jumped up and ran along the length of the dock, hurrying to the door of the boathouse. He pushed it open and entered eagerly. He had been drawn back by some irresistible force which he could not himself explain. He closed the door almost breathlessly and stood leaning against it. There she was, sitting on the edge of the old green rowboat, looking back at him with cool, steady eyes. But Padget was gone.

"Where's that bird?" he cried suddenly, running across and snatching up the chain. He looked at the broken and twisted wire with dismayed eyes.

"He's gone," she said sweetly, smiling at him tantalizingly. "Didn't you know there was a box of tools in the boat here—and that Padget twisted off the wire with a pair of pliers?"

"The son of a gun!" Shifty uttered, so seriously that the girl burst into laughter.

"You see, you're not as smart as you thought you were. I thought you'd gone away and left me."

"Do you know," Shifty said gravely, shaking his head in a bewildered manner, "I just can't get you out of my mind."

"Really?" she questioned, and suddenly dropped her eyes, a flush creeping into her cheeks. "How long are you going to keep me here?"

"The jig's up," Shifty said disgustedly. "I might as well turn you loose. That bird will come back with a crowd and a couple of shotguns."

He turned round, suddenly ran across the room to a door and pulled it open, disappearing. The girl looked after him with amazed eyes.

Shifty found himself in a tiny room wherein were stored several old boats, sails, and a collection of fishing tackle. There was a window in here, and he went over to it and looked out. His eyes lighted with astonishment. Beyond, standing in a dirt driveway which seemed to lead out to a main road, he saw a big yellow car glistening in the sunshine.

He swung round, rubbed his chin, looked out again at the car.

"Say, boy!" he cried hoarsely. "I might as well make this a day and give these funny people a real scare!"

He rushed across to a rough bench and caught up a short-handled ax, twisting it round in his hand. He stood motionless for an instant, thinking. Then he bolted for the door and went into the other room. With a bound he had reached the end of the rowboat. He began to chop furiously at the wood, where the heavy iron staple was set in which fastened the chain.

"What are you doing? What are you doing!" the girl cried, leaping to her feet with wide, startled eyes.

Shifty made no answer; he swung the ax furiously, the sound of the blows and splintering wood reverberating through the room.

"What are you doing?" the girl wailed again, staring at him in utter amazement.

"Shut up!" he snapped, and brought the ax down with a resounding crash. The staple fell to the floor. Shifty hurled the ax across the room, caught up the end of the chain, and dashed across toward the door which led outside, dragging the stunned girl after him.

"Stop that!" she shrieked. "You're hurting my neck."

"Then follow like a nice little puppy!" he yelled. And continued on through the door, the girl coming after him. "Lead me to that automobile!" he ordered, stopping and looking at her fiercely.

"What do you mean?"

"I'll show you!" He started again, round the end of the building, dragging her after him. Ahead of him was the car. He went on, reached the side of the car, and began to haul in the chain as though he were dragging a log. "Come here to me!" he shouted.

"What in the world—are you doing?" she cried wildly as she plumped up against him.

"Get in that car and drive it!"

"What?"

"You heard me! I'm going to get you out of here before that bird comes back. Get in!"

"Never!"

"Now!" He stooped and lifted her in his arms, flung her up into the seat, slid her under the wheel, hauling the chain up after her.

"Start the engine and drive down that road!"

"You—oh!"

The words died on her lips as Shifty scrambled up in the seat beside her, holding the end of the chain.

With a sudden gurgling cry she slumped in her seat and stepped on the starter. The engine began to hum. Shifty had not expected her to obey him so easily.

The car began to move, rolling down the slight incline of the dirt driveway toward the road.

"Drive!" Shifty yelled in her ear. "Drive or I'll tighten up this chain round your neck and choke you to death!"

And drive she did. They went into the main road with a roaring of the open exhaust. Jackie never once glanced at him. And in the next minute Shifty regretted that he had told her to drive. The wind went rushing past his face; he was made almost breathless.

He shot a look at the speedometer and uttered a shout.

"Hey, wait a minute!" he cried huskily. "You're going to kill yourself!"

Once, just once, she took her eyes off the ribbon of road before her. She looked at him, and there was mocking laughter in that look.

"That's what I'm going to do!" she called above the swish of the wind. "I'm going to kill you!"

"Go on," Shifty yelled, settling back in the seat and twirling the end of the chain. "I'd die any time with a girl like you."

Suddenly, unexpectedly, and without warning a big touring car shot out of a crossroad directly in the path of the rushing yellow speedster.

The girl at the wheel jerked back with a gasp; Shifty leaned forward involuntarily. The brakes squeaked, the great yellow car went hurtling sidewise, careened on two wheels, seemed to pause suspended for a brief moment in mid-air, hurled itself across the road.

And in a flash, with the quickness and precision of a man used to thinking in desperate moments, Shifty Cargon reached out his arms and swept the girl from under the steering wheel into his lap; he flung up both

arms, covering her face, bending his body so that it would act as a protecting cushion.

There came a sickening crash of wood and glass, a splintering shriek as the car struck a tree, bounded back, flung itself up into the air, and turned over on its side.

A stabbing pain shot through Shifty—a momentary blindness, an engulfing darkness swept over him. Then his eyes came open; he began to struggle with all his strength. He felt the warm body of the girl hugged against him. Inch by inch he crawled, conscious of that terrible pain shooting through him.

With a little cry he dragged himself and the girl free from the wreckage, staggered to his feet, with her held tightly in his arms.

"Are you hurt?" he whispered hoarsely, swaying to and fro unsteadily.

"No! No!" she uttered faintly, looking up into his eyes. "You are! God forgive me—I didn't mean what I said—I was only joking. That other car!"

"Say, we've had a lot of fun, anyway!" Shifty said in a far-away voice. Then summoning all his fast waning strength, he stooped and set the girl upon her feet. He staggered forward giddily and fell. The last thing he was conscious of was the sound of excited voices and his head pillowed in the lap of the pretty girl with the bobbed blond hair.

XVI.

FATE is a strange dealer of cards, as both Shifty Cargon and Jimmie Allenby were to learn. Jimmie was to learn that a young man who starts out mischievously to fool a grim, truth-seeking world is apt to be fooled himself. And Jackie Carling and Shifty Cargon were to learn that back of all the laughing humor in the world stark tragedy walks, awaiting its chance to shove humor aside and lay a long, lean hand upon the merrymakers.

At the precise moment that Shifty Cargon lay with his head resting in the lap of a hysterically sobbing girl, Jimmie Allenby was pacing up and down the length of his veranda furiously smoking a cigarette, pausing now and then to hurl violent oaths at Berton and Billings, who remained seated in wicker chairs with looks of amazement written upon their faces.

Jimmie had been awakened from a sound slumber at nine o'clock by a mad pounding upon his door. He found Berton wildly jabbering in the hall, with Billings and Berton's niece standing back of him aghast.

When things were made clear to him, Jimmie flew into a violent rage. Rufus Piler was gone. He had departed in the early morning hours with a bag full of the choicest silverware, Jimmie's diamond ring and his wallet, which he must have surreptitiously lifted while Jimmie slept. Berton had discovered the house ransacked, with many valuable articles missing.

For thirty minutes Allenby had been hurling oaths and abuse at Billings and Berton, who sat motionless and silent in their chairs. They had all three come down here after Jimmie had gone over the house and discovered that he had been neatly trimmed by the thin-voiced private investigator.

"Damn it, you recommended him!" Allenby snarled furiously, turning upon Billings in a fit of rage.

"Sure," Billings groaned. "But how did I know he was a crook. I met him several times in New York and he seemed all right. I had his card and I thought maybe we could count on him to work out this mystery without spilling the beans—"

Berton opened his mouth to speak, but said nothing. He was the color of chalk.

"You're fired!" Allenby shouted. "I'm through with this crazy business."

"So am I," Billings groaned, tightening up his suspenders with nervous fingers.

"The whole thing was your idea!" Allenby stormed. "I ought to have had better sense."

"Everything would have been all right if you hadn't picked up that baloney named Cargon," Billings said defensively.

"Why, the two of them were working together. It was a frame-up!" Allenby snorted. "You advising me to bring that fellow into my house and he was already tipped off by the first crook. How do I know you're not a crook yourself, Billings?"

"Now listen, Mr. Allenby," Billings said, turning a shade whiter. "I ain't no guy to stand for that talk. I took this job in good faith. You said you wanted to get your name in the papers and do some heroic work. Everything was going fine till that bird walked out on us."

"May I say a word, sir," Berton said timidly, rising and clearing his throat. "I think I can throw some light on the mystery, sir."

"Sit down!" Allenby roared. "You couldn't throw light on anything. You let a dozen crooks get into my house, throw me into a clothes press, steal all the silverware, my ring, money and half of everything in the house that's valuable. Sit down!"

"Yes, sir," Berton murmured, and dropped back into his chair weakly.

"Now, listen, Mr. Allenby," Billings began bravely again, slipping into his waistcoat and trying to fasten his collar with nervous fingers, "this would have worked all right—"

"You're fired!" Allenby screamed. "I'll pay you half what you asked for and you can get the hell out of here."

"Now, listen, Mr. Allenby," Billings insisted faintly. But he got no further, for at that moment a gray limousine rolled up the driveway at a high rate of speed and drew up at the veranda steps.

Allenby took one look at it and with a cry ran across the veranda. Helen Carling and her Aunt Lucie were opening the door, both reaching for it at the same time, with white, frightened faces.

"Jimmie!" Helen cried.

"What is it, dear?" he asked astonished.

"Oh, Jimmie!" Aunt Lucie moaned.

"What's happened?" Jimmie questioned breathlessly, for whatever it was Helen had given him her hand and he was squeezing it delightedly.

"You must come with us quickly!" Helen said, tearfully. "Jackie has had an accident—I always knew she would. She turned over in her car about five miles from Dickie Weldon's boat house."

"Jackie! Jackie!" Jimmie uttered, dumfounded. "What's she doing out here—I thought she was in Boston."

"No! No! She came yesterday morning. Hurry, Jimmie! This is a dreadful shock. There was a man in the car with her and he's been terribly injured."

"I'll get my hat!"

"Never mind your hat!"

Jimmie turned about wildly. Berton and Billings had run to the steps.

"Oh, Jimmie!" Helen cried. "Jackie was out riding with that prize-fighter who had the fight with the taxi driver."

"What!" Jimmie shouted.

"Yes! Yes! Some people in a car went to their aid and telephoned us. Oh, how in the name of Heaven did Jackie meet that man!"

Allenby popped into the car with a gurgling cry and yelled to Stevens, the chauffeur, to start.

Billings, standing on the veranda steps, looked up at Berton in amazement.

"Did you hear that one? Now tell me this ain't a nut house! The guy walked out on us and went riding with a dame!"

"I knew it all the time," said Berton with a tragic shake of his head.

XVII.

Shifty Cargon came back to a strange world. At least he thought it was strange when he first opened his eyes. He felt a little drowsy, a little weary as though he had done a hard day's work. There was an odd little ache in his head and one of his arms felt very heavy, heavy as lead.

He opened his eyes, but at first was conscious of seeing nothing familiar. He promptly closed them again and sighed deeply. Yes, he was pretty tired. He couldn't remember what he'd done to make him feel tired.

He opened his eyes again and turned his head. He was feeling better now. His strength was coming back. He began to think. Where was he? What had he done last?

Then, as a sweet and compelling picture sweeps suddenly and unanticipatedly before the vision, something gloriously pretty and arresting swept before his eyes. He half raised his head and stared. A soft hand descended against his cheek.

"Gee," said Shifty, boyishly astonished, "it's you."

"Yes," Jackie murmured, wiping a tear from her eye.

"Are you hurt?" he asked with a faint smile.

"No. Only a few bruises, a few scratches. I owe that to you."

She bent over him and he looked into her warm, brown eyes for a long time in happy silence.

"That's great!" he uttered with a contented sigh. He fumbled round and somehow found one of her hands. He rubbed it gently. "I wouldn't have anything happen to you. Say, I've been an awful fool."

"Not half the fool I've been," she said gently. "It's all my fault."

"That's all right," he assured her. "Where am I now?"

"You're in Jimmie Allenby's house again. The same room where you started out to be a false prince. I made them bring you here. Helen and Aunt Lucie raved so that I wouldn't take you there."

Shifty shook his head slowly. "All dark to me," he said. "Who's Helen and Aunt Lucie?"

"Oh!" she cried softly. "You don't know a thing. It's all been a terrible joke to you. Helen Carling is my cousin. She's engaged to marry Jimmie. Aunt Lucie is Helen's guardian—her father's dead."

"Where's Mr. Allenby?" Shifty inquired. "I ought to explain to him why I couldn't keep my appointment last night." He turned his head a little and looked about the room. It all looked very familiar now.

"Jimmie was here a little while ago. I sent him out of the room. He's being an awfully good sport. Jimmie's standing by me—it's a good thing he is, with Helen and Aunt Lucie raving the way they are."

"What are they raving about?" Shifty asked with a slow smile.

"About us," Jackie answered demurely.

"What's the idea?"

"Oh, never mind!" She laid one hand over his mouth. "Poor Jimmie! Poor Mr. Billings! Poor Berton! They've had a terrible time, and it's all my fault."

"How's that?" Shifty asked innocently.

"If you only knew. I never dreamed I'd get into so much trouble. And most of Jimmie's best silverware has been stolen."

"I'll bet he thought I took it," Shifty said seriously.

"For awhile he did," Jackie told him with a little tragic smile. "You see, I planned this whole thing."

"What?" Shifty inquired interestedly. "You mean, putting the chain round my neck?"

"Yes!" She laughed a little, then grew serious. "I've an awful reputation for playing jokes. I live in Boston."

"That's a nice town," Shifty murmured. "So quiet you can think."

"It's a wonder we weren't both killed when my car turned over."

"I wouldn't have worried," Shifty said softly, looking at her with a strange light in his eyes. "Not about myself. I did my best to keep you from being hurt."

"You were wonderful!" She suddenly squeezed his hand and withdrew it quickly, color flooding her face.

"Is that your real name—Jackie?"

"Uh-huh. Jackie Carling."

"You're a great kid!" he said with ill-concealed admiration.

"Is that your real name—Sheffield Cargon?"

"Yes, God help me," Shifty answered with a wry smile. "How'd you learn it?"

She leaned forward again and laid her hand over his. Shifty wound his fingers over hers with a long sigh.

"Listen," Jackie said softly, "and I'll give you some light. "Yesterday morning when I walked onto the veranda Jimmie didn't know I was near the house. Jimmie's butler, Berton, and I have been confidential friends for a long time. I've been spending a part of my vacation time each year out here with Helen. You know, Helen and Jimmie Allenby have been in love for years, but they're always quarreling. I'm never happy unless I can start something. So the minute I arrived I came over and had a talk with Berton. He told me the whole thing—gave it all away. How Jimmie had hired a press agent to make him a famous hero, and how he had picked you up and had brought you out here. And of the plan to make you a prince and all the stunts that

Billings was going to pull off. That looked like a lot of fun to me—and I decided to spoil the whole thing for Jimmie."

"You did," Shifty uttered with a grin.

"Hush!" she said and tapped his lips with her fingers. "I hate men who lie to girls—who try to fool them. I slipped into the grounds yesterday morning and came up on the veranda and saw you." She paused for a moment, and Shifty thought that she suddenly lowered her eyes and blushed.

"That night I went over to a party at Dickie Weldon's bungalow and persuaded ten of the boys to help me kidnap you—"

"I knew there were ten!" Shifty said triumphantly. "It would take that many to hold me."

"My, but, you hate yourself," she murmured. "Well, we got Jimmie first and chucked him into a clothes press. Berton was working with us and turned the lights off. Then when you came back to the house we got you. I wrote a note and had one of the boys nail it to the veranda, telling Jimmie that you had eloped with Helen—"

"Gee!" said Shifty. "I'll bet he loved that."

"Oh, it was funny!" she laughed. "Then I borrowed Dickie Weldon's butler and he helped me get you out of the car into Dickie's old boathouse and chain you up."

"What was the idea?" Shifty asked, puzzled.

"I just wanted the thrill of capturing a real he-man," she answered, dropping her eyes swiftly.

"Why," said Shifty gravely, "I've been running loose round the country for twenty-nine years."

"But you never met the right girl," she suggested, smiling.

"Maybe that's right." He pondered for a moment. "Listen, I've got to get out of here." He pushed himself up with an effort.

"Lie down," she cried, gently shoving him back. "You're injured."

"But you know," said Shifty helplessly, "I can't stay here in Mr. Allenby's house. Now that the prince thing is all off I've got to get back to town and look for a job."

"You can't fight. Your arm's broken."

"Gee," groaned Shifty tragically. "I didn't mean the ring. I've given that up for good. I meant the dairy lunch."

"Is that what you were employed at when Jimmie met you?" she asked soberly.

"Yes," Shifty returned in a far-away tone, gazing up at the ceiling. "But I wasn't ashamed of it. It was honest work—and some day I hoped to get ahead—make some real money, do better things. Well, I guess I just had a pipe dream—" his voice trailed off into the cool depths of the room. He wasn't looking at Jackie; if he had been he would have seen the suggestion of tears in her eyes.

"And you—you forigve me for playnig that silly trick?" she asked plaintively.

"You bet!" Shifty said heartily. "It was a lot of fun for all of us. Poor Mr. Allenby—I guess he's sorry he ever tried to get his name in the paper and be a printed hero."

"Oh, I don't know," Jackie said softly. "He's explained the whole thing to Helen and Aunt Lucie—and Helen has forgiven him for it. She actually thinks he made a great sacrifice for her in trying to pull off such an awful stunt, the poor simp. They're going to be married."

"That's great!" Shifty said. "He's all right. He's a nice boy and he tries real hard to be a hero."

"He just isn't there," Jackie murmured contemptuously. Then she looked down into Shifty's face for a long moment. "Of course, I didn't really try to kill you in that car—I knew it was take the ditch or kill those people in the other car."

"That's all right," he answered, suddenly gazing up at her with a faint smile. "I wouldn't want to see anyone get hurt—I'd rather take the chance myself."

"You're a peach!" Jackie cried suddenly, and with a little laugh she bent down and kissed him.

A startled look came into Shifty's eyes, but only a moment it lingered there. Then fiercely he reached up and drew her into the circle of his arms.

"Gee!" he whispered. "You're a great kid! I fell in love with you the first time I

looked at you. Just give me a chance—I know I'm not up to your class."

"You're too good for the class I belong to," she said in his ear, laying her smooth, velvety cheek against his. "They're all mollycoddles. When will you marry me?"

"What!" said Shifty, amazed.

"You heard what I said. I go get them—when I see what I want, I take it—I don't stand round and talk about it."

"Great!" Shifty uttered, and kissed her so fervently that she gasped. "Right away. Just as soon as I can get out, I'll find a regular job. Maybe Mr. Allenby would let us stay out here for awhile. I could make a real man of him in a few weeks if he'd let me give him some training. Say!" he cried eagerly. "There's an idea—I can ask him for a job."

"You should worry about asking him for a job," Jackie smiled scornfully. "You're worth cultivating—you're a real man—and I've got two or three hundred thousand dollars to start with."

"Gee," Shifty whispered. "I don't want money—I just want you!" He drew her against his breast, held her very close, and uttered a long sigh.

"Meet the prince!" she murmured in his ear.

"The prince is dead!" he whispered back. "I'm starting all over again."

THE END

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MY FRIENDS

THERE'S the awful bore
Comes to my door,
When I've started on a nap,
With, "Don't let me disturb you, dear,"
After a loud *rap, rap!*

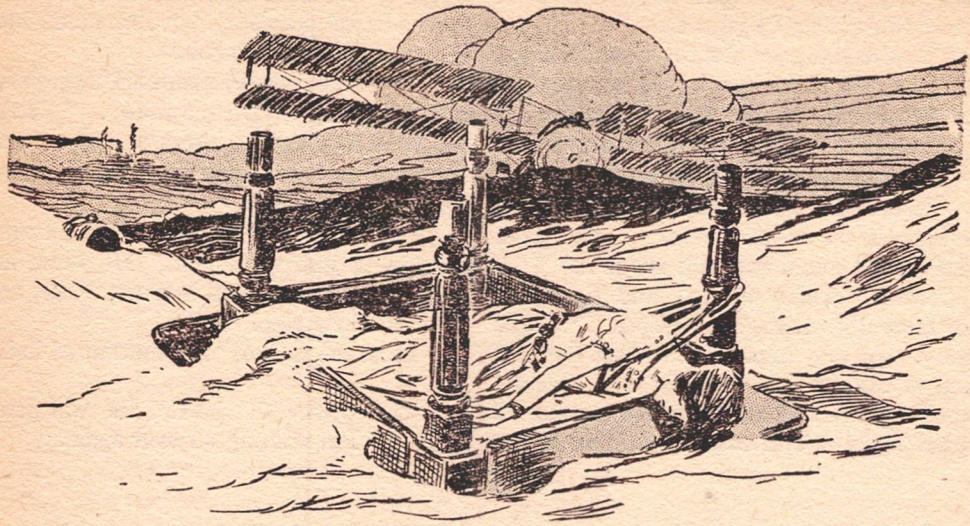
Then there's the one who meets me,
While walking on the street,
And cries, "I hardly knew you, for
You've grown so fleshy, sweet!"

Then there's the friend who floors me
When I'm feeling young and gay,
With, "Pet, you do your hair so well;
But my, it's getting gray!"

Then, when I've nabbed a beau or two,
And feeling quite "the rage,"
There's the friend who says "It's nonsense
For a woman of your age."

So please will kindly Providence,
Before life's journey ends,
Just let me have a little fling
And save me from my friends?

M. G. H.



The Big Gun.

By RICHARD BARRY

Author of "Jes' Sal," etc.

CHAPTER XXI (*Continued*).

HOURS OF YOUTH AND SPRING.

A QUARTERMASTER was calling, "Mr. Bullitt! Mr. Bullitt!"

"Here!" Cyrus answered, Raby thought harshly. The quickness of his response to duty was almost an affront.

The petty officer came forward, handing Cyrus a slip of paper, saying as he saluted, "Message, sir, on the semaphore from the flagship."

Cyrus read and pocketed the paper without comment. Then he offered his arm to Raby. "May I see you to the wardroom?" he asked, "for I will have to be excused."

"What is it?" she asked.

"An order from the chief of staff."

"But surely," already she sensed what it meant, "surely there is nothing for you to do now—at anchor?"

"It won't take me long," he assured her.

At that moment two bells struck and they could see the ship's launch slip along the side from her station beneath her for'ard port davits to the foot of the sea stairs, while the officer of the deck called to the marine on guard near the turret, "Send word to the wardroom the launch is ready for shore!"

"It's the nine o'clock boat!" Raby exclaimed. "Time to go to the ball."

They were in the passage leading to the wardroom as Cyrus and Raby met the stream of officers coming out, all in their long naval capes thrown over their dress coats and half concealing the expanse of gold braid beneath. Here and there an honor man was distinguished by his aiguilettes, while the denizens of the fourth ward were condemned to caps in mute protest against the superiority of feathered triangular hats affected by and enforced on their seniors, who gravely went along slightly ahead of them.

The few feminine guests of the mess flut-

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tered bravely in the show of uniform, as if each perkily insisted that her particular plumage was the most brilliant of the lot, though each in her heart felt awed and solaced and flattered by the solid elegance of the surrounding gold and blue.

Billy encountered them in the passage. "Hurry, Cy, and get your cap!" he called.

"Sorry!" said Bullitt, "but I'll have to wait for the next boat. Semaphore from the flagship holds me."

"But my dance—am I not going to dance with you?" Raby turned on him with an intensity not revealed in her words or manner.

Before Cyrus could answer Tenflair appeared and edged his way among them. He rated the "feather duster" in his hat, and it made the caps of the ensigns look shabby indeed. "Of course you are to dance with me," he called, as he offered Raby his arm. "Am I not to write in your program first?"

"But we've got to wait for Mr. Bullitt," she replied, "until the next boat."

"What's up, Bullitt?" Tenflair asked, striving to appear casual.

"Only an order from the chief of staff to clean, inspect and record telescopic sights before sailing. There'll be one for you on the Comanche."

"No; I got mine this afternoon."

"What!" Raby exclaimed, "then what delayed it to Mr. Bullitt?"

"Perhaps," Tenflair could not help swelling a bit, "Captain Kruger has adopted a suggestion of mine."

"O! *Your* suggestion!" Her eyes narrowed.

"Then your job is done already," Cyrus commented.

"Of course."

"Come!" Tenflair again held out his arm to Raby.

She went calmly to Cyrus and placed her hand on his sleeve. "Take me to the launch, Mr. Bullitt," she said. "Come Billy. He will join us later."

And Tenflair was obliged to bring up a rather disgruntled rear. At the top of the ladder Cyrus stopped, while Raby said to him, "Then we're to have the first dance after midnight, is that it?"

"Yes," Cyrus answered, "I'll be there."

Then he stepped aside and lifted his cap as she went down the ladder followed by Billy and finally by Tenflair, who grinned back at him in triumph as Cyrus went off to what looked like a grimy, all-night job, leaving clear for him, as he had astutely planned, the field of romance.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE BALLROOM WAGER.

FROM a box in the middle of the balcony in the ballroom of the hotel at the point the Secretary of the Navy looked down on a brave, gay picture. Admirals all though they were, potentially, only a few wore their four stars on their collars. But of captains, lieutenants, commanders, and ensigns there were enough to form a solid background, wall to wall, against which sparkled and glowed the ladies of the fleet, far, near and very near.

From the warm May night there floated in the odor of May lilac and the early jasmine of a fragrance just beginning. On the honeysuckle trellis, beneath which yet many a kiss was to be emplanted on fair lips not unreluctant, the tender tips of rosy bloom were only beginning, but the wistaria hung nearby pendulant with globulous beauty. The roses against the southern wall, lured by the sun which ricocheted from the stern sides of Fortress Monroe, were already opening their buds. More than one couple fondled them there as they drifted by, straining to hold the moments as they flew.

It was a night for love, for dreams!

Tenflair had tried to monopolize Raby as they came in on the Apache's launch, but she treated him with her accustomed nonchalance. To him she seemed the same as ever.

To himself he said, "Six or seven hours—not much, but 'twill be enough."

Though she clung to Billy's arm on the way from the landing to the hotel, still "pretending" he was her cavalier, while he commented, "We're in the same boat, sis. I'm taking the family because I don't want to unduly encourage anyone in particular, or render suicide popular in Norfolk, and

you're taking the family so that at the ball you can be sure of getting the whole fleet!"

Which appeared to be something like the truth, especially when they reached the ballroom and Raby secured her program and promptly was mobbed by what appeared to be a combined phalanx of determined officers. In fact, Billy made a joke of the occasion. He mounted a chair and called, in imitation of command, "Attention, men! No crowding! No shoving! Take your time! First come! First served! The ambulance is waiting for any casualty, so take your broken legs quickly! Easy there! Miss Vosmer will positively appear in each and every dance! Step lively there in the back —you!" Etc., etc.

She lost control of her program almost before she had it, and presently the young aide who had been with her father in Washington complained, bitterly, "Look here, Raby," as he held her program up, "is this official? Does Percy Tenflair get every other dance?"

She seized the program and looked at it. Tenflair had been the first to get it and he had written his name on exactly half the spaces. She saw him nearby looking at her with elation.

Raby tore the program into four pieces and calmly thrust them under a chair.

"No," she said, "and I'm not going to have a program, either. Too much bother."

"That's the stuff!" cried the aide, reaching a gloved hand toward her, as the music struck up a fox trot, "snap into it!"

And they whirled away, while the smile faded from the face of Tenflair, but he was on hand for the next dance, which happened to be a waltz. He made it a hesitation and began his protest.

"I don't mind you having a good time, Raby," he poured into her ear as they circled the floor, "and it's fine to know you are so popular—most popular girl in the Navy, everyone says—but it does hurt my feelings to have you flout me so publicly."

"How about my feelings?"

"Why, I've always been most considerate."

"'Considerate?' Marking up half my dances?"

"You gave them to me."

"When?"

"On the phone."

"So you took them—on paper? Well, one affects the other."

That stemmed the flow of protest for a time. Tenflair danced well, and was especially proud of his hesitation waltz, which he had learned during the winter in Washington and which he had taught Raby recently. He applauded vigorously for the encore when it came and his arm was again around her he murmured, "If this be the food of love, play on!"

"Love!" said she. "Huh!"

"I'm mad about you—only love of my life!"

"What is love?"

"It's you and me, and Maytime, and fire and madness!"

"Oh!"

His arm seemed to hold her more closely. She edged her hand between his coat and her breast and gently pried him away.

"You know as well as I, don't you—Raby?" he murmured.

"Know what?"

"Love?"

There was no answer.

"You know that I love you?"

"Madly, I suppose."

"Well, passionately, and—forever and ever."

There was another silence. Then the dance came to an end and he managed to pilot her out to the veranda and along to the honeysuckle trellis, where he slipped an arm about her, only to find, strangely, for he hardly knew how it happened, that she was not inside his arm—physically she seemed as elusive as she was temperamentally.

"And you love me, I know that," he continued.

"In the same way, I suppose." He could not see her face, but he did not detect the badinage in her voice.

"I suppose a girl does not have the same feelings as a man," he replied, "they say love wakes in a woman long after it does in a man, but—"

"Love, did you say?" Her query was most gently put.

"Of course. Love! Isn't it all to-night. To-morrow we'll be out there with the fleet, greasy with the guns, but to-night it's love and courtship. What will you be doing to-morrow?"

Still her roguish smile could not be seen—in the shadow—else he might have desisted. "Thinking—of you—what else?" she replied.

He impulsively embraced her and strove for a kiss, but she held him off. "Please, Percy, you ought to know me better than that, or, perhaps, you don't know me well enough."

"By gum!" he exclaimed, "perhaps I don't. Are you an icicle?"

She laughed now in his face, with the prettiness he called childish. "No," she temporized, "not an icicle or I might be melted by such fiery love."

"Well," he took a fresh tack, "I'd like to know what you think about love. What does it mean to you?"

She stood away from him another few inches and looked up soberly at the star-strewn heavens. The glamour of the spring seemed to envelop her.

"It's peace," she said softly, "peace—and understanding."

"'Peace!'" he exclaimed, "you must have a preacher among your suitors."

"No," she answered simply, "but I wish I knew a man of understanding—who would be as keen as *some* of my other suitors."

Then she chuckled before he could make reply or exact explanation and started back for the ballroom.

He wanted to know what dances he could have. "Whenever you're around and I'm not dancing!" she replied.

"But let's make some definite. Let me have the first after midnight."

"Taken! Sorry!"

"But you tore up your program."

"It's taken, just the same."

"By whom?"

"I don't like the way you ask, but I don't mind telling you—Mr. Bullitt!"

They were under the light now. He faced her squarely and she could see his eyes blazing. "He'll not be here by midnight!" he declared.

"He'll keep his engagement with me."

"If he does he'll disobey an order. Being a gob that wouldn't mean much to him."

The blaze in her eyes now equaled that in his. "I'll bet on his integrity!" she said, "he'll not disobey any order, and he'll be here for the dance—at midnight!"

"What'll you bet?"

"A box of candy."

"Make it a bet worth while. Bet your Home Sweet Home dance."

Her spirit of defiance and belief rose to equal his of audacious daring. "Taken!" she cried.

A moment later she was fox trotting in the arms of the executive officer from the Apache.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE BIG GUN'S MESSAGE.

RABY watched her wrist watch with suspense. If Cyrus did not appear by midnight she would have to give the last dance—token of heart devotion, with its privilege of escorting her to her hotel—to Tenflair.

Which was not the worst of it. The worst was that she might not again see Cyrus before the fleet sailed. And if he did come? Would she have permitted another to make it appear he came tarnished?

She gave but fleeting thought to the last contingency, but the mere reflection that she had *discussed* the possibility of Cyrus's skimping any official duty caused her to feel unworthy her heritage. As the constant resident in a naval household there were some things she well knew did not merit consideration. "An officer's honor and a woman's," she had heard her father say, "are alike—both must be above suspicion."

She felt there was one way she could undo any damage she might have committed, unwittingly, to Cyrus. She would make Tenflair face him when he arrived, and have the imputation removed, even as it was made.

She managed her dances so that Tenflair was her partner as the eleventh hour moved on toward its zenith. At five minutes to twelve Cyrus entered the ballroom.

He stood near the door, waiting for the dance to be over, ready to claim the next.

"You lose!" she exclaimed to her partner.

Raby insisted on stopping near Cyrus. Thus Tenflair was obliged to witness their meeting. Again he felt he could not be mistaken in her elation at the appearance of the ensign, as she said to him: "You've won my bet."

"I'm glad," Cyrus assented, "I hope it's something handsome."

"It's something Mr. Tenflair wanted."

Both men stood, as if at attention, the girl between. Neither smiled, while about them chatted innumerable couples.

"You're a fast worker," Tenflair was the first to speak, addressing the ensign, "to check up for Captain Kruger in two hours."

"My sights were cleaned before the order came," Cyrus said, "all I had to do was weigh the mercury. That's a good idea of the chief of staff—glad to see him following that line."

If he guessed the origin and animus behind the granting of the order, now palpably failed in its chief object, he did not show it. In any event he was heaping coals of fire on the head of the ordnance chief of the Comanche, who excused himself and withdrew.

Cyrus, however, could not know he had won the first tilt on the field of romance. He went at his dance with Raby conscientiously. Luckily it was a one-step, the only dance in which he felt comfortable. He proceeded stiffly around the floor, his arms held rigidly in the poses most approved by the dancing master at the academy, where he had studied the graces of the ballroom as he had the requirements of diplomatic usage—as a matter of necessity.

Tenflair, watching him, seemed gratified, pointing Cyrus out to a comrade with the remark, "Funny how gobs are all alike—carry their stiffness into their social relations—can't unbend; don't dare to, I suppose, for fear of exposing themselves."

Raby was asking in Cyrus's ear: "How did it come that Mr. Tenflair knew about that order before you got it?"

"Because he induced Captain Kruger to issue it."

"Really?"

"I checked it up. That's what kept me."

"But I thought the job itself was an all-night one."

Cyrus smiled indulgently. "It was meant to be," he admitted, "only it happened to parallel work I had already done." He was silent awhile and then added: "It may be that after this cruise Mr. Tenflair will have some checking up to do."

The dance was over. Before any one could claim the next she led him to the veranda, where she insisted he tell her more about the automatic sight.

"It's bad luck," he explained, "to talk about anything until it is accomplished."

"But it means so much to you."

"Yes. It means the right to be free of the past—" he stopped.

"How? Tell me!" she pleaded.

"Well if it succeeds there will be royalties from the patent, and that will make me independent for the first time."

"Oh!"

She placed her hand in the crook of his arm and led him along the veranda, down the walk, to the honeysuckle trellis. The perfume descended, enveloped them like an intoxicant. He suddenly thought of Circe and the perfumes she threw over Ulysses. But why Circe? He told himself he should banish the simile.

The spring sap was rising all about him—through the veins of the trees, into the buds, into the newly opened bloom of the persistent honeysuckle.

And there behind them was a lilac. Nostalgia smote him, for lilacs were due in Linkersport at this time, but not honeysuckles, which came forth in May only this far south.

Yet the lilac mingling with honeysuckle seemed to produce a heady intoxicant that would unman him. He felt like running away, and yet his legs were weak.

Was that the sap rising in his veins, too? Were the new seeds germinating within him about to burst through from the restraining earth of his resolve?

He knew not how to make love, and

he most steadfastly would have avoided it if he did know how. In desperation he began talking about his invention, the nearest thing to his heart—so he believed. Raby, not unskilled in curious evidence of male romanticism, seemed even more pleased than as if his theme were boldly one of frankest adoration.

"If my device works," he insisted, with a strain, which would have more truly mirrored his feelings if it had said, "I love you! How can I live without you," though he went on: "She'll go ten to twelve shots in three minutes—twice the present record—and every one a bull's eye."

There! He was half conscious of boasting—but she led him on.

Perhaps she got the sotto voice "I love you," though she replied to what her ears heard with: "My! Won't you be the biggest gun in the navy then?"

Ordinarily he would have disdained this, but, as he said to himself later, he was so drunk with the wine of love that he admitted, "It will mean a new era in the service."

Her hands clutched his arm, and her eyes were lambent as they seemed to devour him, but she, too, talked in terms of the age-old calling in which she had been born and reared, as she replied: "I'm so glad for your sake—so glad it will mean all you want it to—to bring the target practice back where it belongs. I know what you want—and I want you to know I'm pulling for you. I haven't told you, but I've accepted an invitation to sail with the Laimvirs on their yacht, the Galatea, for Guantanamo. They will get there in time for battle practice and I'll be near enough to watch the semaphores through a glass. I know the code."

Her lips said this surely. He could not be mistaken, but what of her eyes—what of her heart? He knew well that a voice beyond him was crying from within to her. Was there also one from her crying to him? Semaphore! A code! Battle practice!

He gritted his teeth and pulled himself to his sober senses with a wrench. He would still be the officer—still be the man of certainty who would not mortgage a future—chiefly hers.

Strangely, fear of her reply went away as a fantastic idea was formed in his brain. Was it the lilac mingling with the honeysuckle and drenching him in perfume that cloyed his senses and made him reckless of any possible blow to pride or resolution?

The sap was running down the boles of the trees! The earth was being torn asunder by the germination of the seeds!

Yet he spoke in the formula of the service and she was quite unprepared for his proposal, connoiseur though she was in the varying forms.

"Don't mind the semaphore!" he admonished. There seemed to be a fever in his eyes. "But listen to the shots of the Apache—and consider I am talking to you—in code."

"What code?"

"Ours—yours and mine."

She came very near—too near, he feared. How *could* he endure it?

"What's the key?" she asked.

The fever in his eyes was not calmed by what he saw in hers; rather, it was fanned.

"It is simple," he muttered, "one word for each shot."

"And the words?"

"The first shot will mean, 'Bessarabia'—the second, 'Vosmer'—the third, 'will'—the fourth, 'you'—the fifth, 'be'—" He wet his lips with his tongue; they were dry and parched, and he interpolated: "Five shots is the record for a string; if I go beyond that I win."

"But the key to the code—you have not finished."

"The sixth shot will mean, 'my'—the seventh, 'wife!'"

Into the eyes of Bessarabia came the far-away look. This was something like what she had been trying to achieve for a long time, but in a manner so novel that for a moment she was speechless.

He regarded her silence at first with apprehension and then with a slowly dawning horror. The comprehension came to him that he had presumed. All that he had guarded against he had permitted to happen—in a moment of weakness. And now she would either laugh at him—or pity him—or—

She who had boasted that she never had refused a proposal and never had accepted one, who was "engaged to be engaged" to so many she had lost the count of them, after a very long interval looked at him shyly, saying: "What a queer way to propose!"

His lower lip trembled. He was covered with confusion. He felt himself blushing from head to toe. "I'm sorry—terribly sorry!" he stammered. "Please try to forgive me!" and turned and fled.

She was so startled she sank back against the trellis. None had ever left her before without some sort of contact, or attempt at one. She had been obliged often to repel kisses which seemed almost obligatory even with being "engaged to be engaged." The usual compromise was a kiss on the hand. Once she had accepted one on her forehead—from an admiral older than her father.

But with this proposal, most ingenious, most desired of all, there was not even a touch of the hand offered.

Instead, there she was, the "bride of the fleet," the "most popular girl in the navy" deserted in Lover's Lane at the most luscious moment of a honeysuckle spring, during a farewell ball while more than fifty men in blue and gold within sound of her voice would have welcomed the privilege of being there alone with her!

What could she do? Go after him, and appear to be accepting his proposal before it was made? Ignore him and refuse it before he could confirm it?

Her sense of humor finally came uppermost. "At any rate," she concluded, "it is not without a certain fitness for the daughter of the admiral to have a little more interest than any one else in marking the rapidity of fire from the big guns."

CHAPTER XXIV.

OFF FOR BATTLE PRACTICE.

AT the entrance to the veranda, just where the light commenced, as she returned, she met him coming back. He took her arm and led her into the shadow. It was the first time he had touched her, except in a dance or in formal hand greeting.

She was passive. This was different. Yet, how should she receive it? His first remark seemed to make it worse.

"I was mad!" he said.

"Oh!" she exclaimed skeptically.

He felt her tone was ironical.

"Mad!" he hastened on. "June madness—or May madness. I guess the season advances more rapidly down here in Virginia. It's usually May this time of year up in Jersey." He breathed heavily as if affected by summer heat.

This did put a completely new light on it. Had he outguessed her, after all. Had she been on the verge of succumbing for the first time to the bungling of an old fumbler in "June Madness?"

She laughed merrily. "Oh! It's the spring!" she said.

"No—it's you—you!"

"I heard you the first time."

He half lifted his hands, advancing toward her as if again overcome. She retreated, holding up hers, as if in defense, while she pleaded mockingly: "Oh, spare me, Mr. Madman!"

The spell was gone. They were like two abandoned old tubs wallowing in the trough of a heavy sea. Fears, apprehensions seemed to have seized both. The serenity of their recent high adventure was obliterated in an instant.

Forgetting his own unseemly departure —inexcusable as he well knew when he thought it over—he saw now in her apparently measured aloofness a girl rather spoiled, alert in any tilt across a romantic fence separating a man from a maid, and —his heart failed him again as he thought of it—the daughter of the man who had so deeply befriended him.

She, expert in all flirtatious finesse, was unable to lead him along. She was stunned, alarmed and—cautious!

While they confronted each other thus a young lieutenant spied Raby from the veranda, and called: "There you are! Isn't this my dance?" and came bounding down, two steps at time.

It seemed a welcome relief. "Of course!"

she said, and took his arm, and left Cyrus with a mere, "Excuse me, please!"

As he stood alone, in the dark, thinking it over and gradually getting his bearings again he was glad she had left him unceremoniously. That tended to even the score. But was it the same? And had she not politely asked to be excused?

No. He could find little solace in that. He had been the fool. He had declared himself before he was ready, before it was time, before he knew if he were welcome. And then had added insult to injury by bolting like a coward.

June madness indeed! A pretty name for something she was justified in thinking uglier.

Filled with misery, he went in to the ballroom and stood behind a group in one corner. He saw her dancing, laughing, chatting, apparently light-hearted.

This deepened his gloom. He could not have danced with another girl if his life depended on it. How else could he interpret her action other than as that of a flirt? Again he forgot his own dereliction, forgot all that had passed between them earlier and in the long months and years before.

His pride seemed suffering a deadly wound. He had intended to seek her again and say good-by, but he lacked the heart. He felt he could not face her.

He went to the landing and sought the first launch that would take him to the Apache.

Raby, meanwhile, missed not another dance, and most of them were split. It would have been difficult to believe in the face of her gaiety and her apparently intense enjoyment that anything unusual had happened.

Tenflair was on hand constantly. He felt the flow of some deep spring of feeling within her. It seemed to inspire him with a renewed determination to win her. His resolve to "bring matters to a head" this night returned with redoubled force.

And, as the evening wore on, and he saw no more of Bullitt and he found Raby preferring no one else before him, his confidence increased. The tide seemed to have set in again in his direction.

It was toward three o'clock while dancing with her that he ventured the remark: "So I did win my Home Sweet Home after all?"

"Did I say so?"

"Didn't I?"

She looked at him defiantly, replying: "I didn't tell Mr. Bullitt the terms of the wager—if that is what you mean."

"But he's gone—gone back to his ship."

She caught a deep breath. "How do you know?"

"I went with a party down to the last boat, and the Apache coxswain told me."

This puzzled her. Tenflair must have been keeping uncommonly close watch on the movements of both of them. Was it possible he had overheard the episode under the honeysuckle trellis? But it was impossible for her to believe Cyrus had really gone back to the fleet, ignoring any further chance to speak to her. Why, he wouldn't see her again until he returned from the cruise! Until after battle practice! It would be months!

She did feel desperate. Again she taunted her escort, asserting: "He'll be here for Home Sweet Home with me."

Tenflair watched her narrowly. He knew Raby of old. It was very difficult to tell when she was bluffing and when not, but he put his hazard to the touch again.

"Very well," said he, "and if he does not come, then you dance it with me."

"Why not?" It was like her—yes and no. Still it left the door open.

At four o'clock, when the bells on the ships were striking eight times, the orchestra struck up "Home, Sweet Home!" Raby was dancing with her father's aide, when a stalwart arm claimed her.

"Mine," said Tenflair. The aide looked to Raby for confirmation.

She slipped into the embrace of the older man assuringly, and gave him one of her most radiant smiles as she replied: "Mind, Percy, this is not paying a wager. You lost that."

"Of course," said he, "and you shall have a five-pound box in payment. I'll wireless the order in the morning."

The old waltz clung and clung, encore after encore. The dancers would not let it

die. While it was still in only the second encore Tenflair remarked: "I just bet the engineer on the Apache their starboard turret will not fire over five shots a minute."

This seemed to rouse something very deep within her. She slipped from his embrace and led him along the floor toward the exit and the cloak rooms. As they reached the outer passage and were alone, for the moment, she whirled on him, exclaiming: "I'll make a bet with you on that!"

"On what?"

"The fire of the Apache's starboard turret."

She was breathing very deeply. Was it the dance which had so tired her—or was something fatalistic ruling her wayward mind?

"Good!" he replied. "What shall it be?"

She took one deep breath as if about to make a head dive into the deepest water she ever had seen. Then she answered calmly:

"Myself!"

He whistled under his breath. "Now, let us get this straight. If the Apache's starboard turret makes no more than five shots to the minute in the next battle practice you are to marry me! Is that it?"

Slowly, very slowly, but unmistakably, she nodded her head.

They were in a recess. He reached down as if to embrace and kiss her. She held him off. "Not yet," she said.

He wanted to take her to her hotel, but she hailed the wives of two officers who were passing and shortly the three had arranged to go together to the landing and see the men off, and wait there until dawn, and so wave their farewells. She sought Billy and told him.

Despite all he could do, Tenflair was not able to have another moment alone with her.

The anchors were already snug on the forecastles; the capstans taut with their heavy cables neatly wound around. Steam was up in every boiler. The last of the launches made their belated trips. The last of the floating feathers above the evening dress climbed the sea stairs. The final davits picked up the launches and swung them to their lashed holds over the middle main decks.

At last, as the first streak of dawn showed up beyond the far sand dune of distant Henry, the ardois on the Kiowa blinked, the first squadron turned its four noses as if they were one to the sou'-sou'-east. The others swung behind, and the ships began slowly streaming out between the capes as the light crept into the east.

The Atlantic fleet was off for annual battle practice in Guantanamo Bay.

CHAPTER XXV.

A HIGH MARK.

AT lunch in the wardroom every one was yawning; Virginia was aft; Carolina off the starboard bow. After the meal a few inmates of the Fourth Ward tried to revive memories of the last night's dissipation. They sang the old toast:

"He's a rounder, so they say;
Wants to go to heaven, but he's going the other way!
Drink it down! Drink it down!"

Cyrus never had joined in these jovialities, but this time he stopped in the door and looked on longingly. If he only knew how to relax—if he only knew how to enter that world of light-hearted frivolity! There might be some hope for him then. He might be able to cope with the realities of Bessarabia—in a field all her own.

Where did he stand with her? What had he said? What had he done? Had he proposed to her or not? Had she laughed at him, scorned him, or was she merely polite? The uncertainty was maddening, yet the distance between them was widening at the rate of twelve knots an hour. He could not telephone; he could not wire. One of the especial injunctions of the admiral to all officers was that the wireless was not to be used for personal messages except of severe importance, cases of life and death; then each message was to be passed on by a captain before the air was burdened. How could Cyrus tell his captain that this was

a matter—to him—of life and death, spiritual life or death?

And if the permission were granted, what could he wire to her? " Didn't mean what I did. Please forgive me. I love you," or something near that. He, Cyrus Bullitt, ordnance officer of the Apache, No 1 in his class, the Old Sphinx of the Academy. It was unthinkable—yet he thought it—and did not do it.

Billy unconsciously offered salve to his wound.

"When did you disappear, you old sport?" he chaffed.

" Oh, I turned in before four bells. Did you see your sister home?"

" No. Tenflair wanted to, and there were plenty of others; but she sent us all on ship while she came to the dock with Mrs. Carson and Mrs. Eberle and waved us off."

A fierce elation came to Cyrus and clutched his heart. He could not have told why, but there was something soothing in that contemplation of Raby avoiding a solitary trip to her hotel with Tenflair, and instead fluttering a handkerchief as the gray boats sailed into the dawn. An appropriate farewell to her father and brother, of course, yet something inside set him singing with the more frivolous ones—singing silently.

The first day was the hardest. After that he settled into the dull routine of the daily drill of the crew, for it was in preparation that the scores would be made—the work of a few minutes would finally register the tally for a year.

A week later a wireless was picked up and passed around, which said: " Private steam yacht Galatea, carrying owner, C. F. Laimvir and party, sighted three hours southwest of Key West." They were then off Cienfuegos and very near their objective."

Was Raby with the Laimvirs? Cyrus felt sure she must be. Again he conquered an impulse to ask for permission to use the wireless for a private message.

The next day they laid to in a cove on the north side of the bay, while the supply ships made the rounds and replenished the larders. Meanwhile the destroyers and torpedo boats went into maneuvers. These were followed by the cruisers. It was ten days before the capital ships were ready. Everything possible was done to simulate battle conditions. The hulls had been painted gray before they left the Roads, but now the superstructures were largely removed, the rails torn down, the decks stripped for action.

The final maneuver was to be a contest between the four squadrons, two on each side, each striving to outplace the other. Just before this came the target practice, a far more important event, for in the target practice were to be discovered those among the men who merited prize money and the class ratings, which were even better than immediate money, as they meant permanent raises in pay.

The battleship range was established in north cove, where the uninhabited marshes extended beyond for many dreary miles, so there would be no apparent chance of hitting anything—except the desired targets. The roadstead to Cienfuegos lay at right angles.

At the entrance to the roadstead a scout cruiser was stationed to warn off any chance boat which might stray that way, although it was off regular steamer lanes.

The flagship went on the range first, after having first described the customary half arc to get up steam and to be ready with the minimum speed of twenty knots.

Ten miles off lay the targets, four oblong stretches of burlap nailed on flimsy scantling, dipped to a battleship gray, but grid-ironed with black lines. A black spot twelve feet in diameter, but looking like a dime at ten miles, was in the center of each—the bull's-eye.

Each target was nailed to a movable raft which was propelled back and forth over a quarter mile scope by means of towing lines attached to steamers on either side, but so far away from the targets that only a tipsy gunner on a mad battleship could hit them by mistake.

As the firing ship went on the range the steamer would start in the opposite direction, so that the target moved laterally across its path.

Thus were fairly approximated battle conditions—guns fired from moving ships at moving objects.

Each test occupied only three minutes, or the time necessary for a ship to go one mile at the minimum speed rate. When a shot went through a target it was a hit, when through a black spot it was a bull's-eye.

All were hoping to equal or surpass the Comanche's record of the year before—five hits in three minutes.

The Kiowa came careening along primed for the test under a dull sky, for the day threatened rain. The men were piped to quarters, while the spotters gestured aloft in the battle towers, the fire control officers with glasses in hand huddled close to their instruments.

A tense moment. The whole fleet at anchor miles in the rear, the other contestants of the first squadron—the Arapahoe, the Comanche and the Apache—waiting close by, the decks crowded with unofficial observers.

Then the flash of the big gun as the Kiowa sped, cutting the water like a meat cleaver through cheese. A long time and then the crack in the ears—or was it a crash? Say a crack-crash—and the flash of the next shot almost simultaneously, while light-brown smoke settled back against the sides of the gray moving meteor.

"There! Where is she?" The glasses strove to pick up the shell. Some did, but most did not.

"See! Hold your glasses a bit above the board. There—now—catch her—trajectory about twice the length of your arm, collar to cuff—see her bulge—now! Ah! She'll make it! Yes? No? A hit!"

"Stop talking! Look!"

"Is it in two y? Three b, I think. A bull's-eye? Pshaw! No!"

In the canvas of the target, around it, behind the canvas the water spurts. It blows a geyser twice as high as the target. No one can tell for certain whether or not any shell had gone through. Incorrect reports flash all over the fleet. They must wait for the steamers to bring in the target before the spotters can announce their decision.

Meanwhile the shells seem to carry on interminable life—a life commensurate with their size and importance. The largest rifles ever made by man are these. Naturally they do not go off and let that be the end of it.

After the second shot left the gun the shell of the first can be seen hopping over the waves beyond the target. They could see far, far off a geyser spout. Then in a still longer time still another geyser was seen—a fourth—a fifth. The last was twice as far beyond the targets as the Kiowa was in front. The ricochet extended almost thirty miles—a veritable sea serpent of leviathan energy.

No wonder the scout cruisers patrol the entrances!

Meanwhile the sound had been rolling. With shot following shot it seemed to compound its multitudinous reverberation. It reached, it gathered and spread and curled under the very heavens; it crept along the edges of the water and climbed up, with each separate discharge, like a swift flame adding its mite to the great holocaust.

The ends of each sound leaped together and crackled and crashed there, booming low in the silent air with a sullen, bitter joy.

The air did not dispel nor distance dissipate the gaunt grandeur of that unholy sound rolling up its total until at length it seemed to rend, to tear the very being of the beholders.

While all waited the spotters' report they seemed laved in the unspeakable sublimity of the full-grown cry of the great guns.

Then the arm of the semaphore on the umpire boat fell and rose and waved, and all the fleet could read: "Kiowa—first string—three minutes—speed, 22.4 knots—five shots—four hits—two bull's-eyes."

A mighty cheer went up from every deck. The flagship had nearly equaled the great record of the Comanche of the year before. It was a high mark at which to aim.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"SILENCE!"

NOW, while the steamers repaired the targets and replaced them, the Kiowa withdrew to her place at the head of the line, and the Arapahoe prepared to take her place on the range.

Admiral Vosmer was on the flying bridge with the captain of the Kiowa, Reacock. Theoretically, an admiral should not take sides in battle practice, but he naturally can't help wanting his flagship to do well.

"Looks good for us, Reacock," he remarked, with a broad grin as the semaphore message was flashed.

"Anyway," the captain pretended impersonal aplomb, "the Kiowa has hung up something at which to shoot. If we're topped the fleet will have to hang up new records. And it 'll take the Comanche to do it."

Admiral Vosmer pursed his lips. "How about the Apache?" he asked dryly.

The captain shook his head and shrugged his shoulders, asking skeptically: "What can she do without pointers? Might as well try it without a navigator."

The admiral replied: "Strange what confidence I have in your Bullitt! Did I ever tell you how I first picked him out on the old Kansas, packing prunes?"

The captain was tempted to say he had heard that story more than once, as he had, but it seemed better to humor the admiral, so he listened again, with apparent avidity. In the midst of it the quartermaster replied: "The Arapahoe's stopped, sir, after one shot."

They leveled their glasses on the sister ship and picked up, on the fore deck, a group of balked gunners, half clothed, yammering about the umpire and the turret captain.

"What is it?" asked the admiral.

It might be a miss-fire, a broken powder bag, a hang-fire, a twisted shaft, an ill-placed shell—any of a dozen items, any one of which is deemed sufficient for the umpire to order the firing to cease and the ship to lose her turn on the range.

Then through the glass they could see the umpire counting some broken powder grains in the palm of his hand and pointing to them.

"Broken powder bag!" commented the captain. "Happens too often."

It was a hard blow for the crew on the Arapahoe, for thus went their chance at the prize money. They could be seen shaking fists at the umpire, like a crowd of balked ball players on a diamond, as if he and not one of their number had been responsible for the catastrophe.

The Arapahoe listed her bow and trailed off sadly to her station. And now, proudly, swiftly, came the Comanche. Once across the range at two-thirds speed to give the pointers a "feel" of the air and the distance, and to tune up the boiler rooms. Then she rounded the stake boat and bore down across the line with the directness of a savage arrow.

"Tenflair knows his business," Captain Reacock said to the admiral. "Smart trick, that stepping it off—putting the heel of his weapon into his pointers' hands. It's the details that count."

"True," assented the admiral.

A sudden hush fell on the fleet. *Boom!* went the first gun of the Comanche's string. And again *Boom!* And again!

Almost before they knew it, so swiftly, so tautly did the war vessel work, she was back in station, the steamers were pulling the targets out for the spotters to examine, and the semaphores were waiting the signal. Soon it flashed: "Comanche—first string—speed, 24.6 knots—six shots—five hits—four bull's-eyes."

This time a mightier yell rang across the sullen, waste waters of old Guantanamo. It seemed to assault the sleeping Spaniards on San Juan Hill.

"A world's record, I reckon," said Admiral Vosmer to Captain Reacock, who could not conceal his chagrin at the wiping out of the lead of the Kiowa. "That takes it away from H. M. S. Lion for her five hits in five shots in the Solent the year after the war."

He beamed. The admiral stood a sure winner, for whichever ship topped the list still the Atlantic fleet led the world.

"Look!" interrupted Reacock. "What's this?" The semaphore from the Apache was signaling. In a moment the quartermaster laid a blank before the admiral with its scribbled message. He read, thought for a minute, and scribbled a return on the back, handing it back to the quartermaster.

"The Apache wants to try her new plane while she runs her string," he commented to the captain. "It's Bullitt's helicopter.

He told me he wanted to try it out first in battle practice, and my boy, Billy, is going up in the cockpit. I wish him luck. Only I told them to wait until after lunch. It's nearly twelve now."

"Likely to be a squall then." The captain pointed to black clouds gathering in the west.

"They don't last long here in the tropics," the admiral responded as he went below.

An hour later a tropical storm was drenching the fleet. Seemingly solid sheets of water joined the sea to the heavens. But time and tide and the schedule of a battle fleet wait for neither man nor elements. This was not a Chinese army which could adjourn activities until the sun came out. In fact, a storm would the more clearly approximate probable fighting conditions, for opposing fleets most often chose moments of elemental chaos for attack.

Though the Apache got the worst of it, the fleet in general would get the best of it through its cloud of observers annotating every phase of conditions under vicious stress of weather.

By two o'clock, when they were to be on the range, the rain was partially stopped, but the wind had risen to intense velocity—seventy-seven miles an hour, the bridge reported—and a pall of blackness came into the sky. The sharpest eyes could barely discern the targets across the intervening miles of angry foam.

"What rotten luck!" Billy exclaimed to Cyrus, "for this storm to come just as you start—of all moments! And Tenflair had a perfect millpond!"

Cyrus was calm and even subtly elated. "But it's the best of luck, don't you see?" he insisted. "If I were working with pointers it would be a different thing, but here's where the automatic sight has a real chance. I believe my needle will work better in a storm than in a calm—anyway, we'll see. But let's take a last look at your helicopter!"

They passed to the stripped superstructure over the quarter-deck, where the plane lay ready for the trial. The well for the artificial wind had been moved to face the gale. Little boats were in place of former wheels, automatically converting the airship into a hydroplane.

It was arranged that Billy was to cast off the moment the first shot was fired, so that he might report the effects of rising from a deck sustaining the tremors of heavy gun fire.

Four bells sounded from the ship's clock.

"Two o'clock!" said Cyrus, shaking hands. "Good luck!"

"Good luck to you!" Billy began arranging his leather helmet.

A moment later the Apache rounded the stake boat and proceeded across the range, taking her allowed trial before the test.

Cyrus stepped into the starboard turret where the gun crew already awaited him. If it was a moment marking a new era in the combative life of man, a moment in which the primal brute was to step one step nearer to emancipation from all sanguinary strife, no one there seemed to know it.

To them it was just another contest, with a chance to split a thousand dollars among them, and for each man to add five dollars a month to his pay. Most of them resented the lack of a pointer.

The pointer who in all other turrets, and always before here in that of the Apache, sat up there pick-a-back on a little saddle by the side of the shiny steel haunch, grasping a big wheel as a chauffeur his steering gear, and moving easily on its barbette the three-hundred-ton turret with its monster of a rifle with a mouth sixteen inches wide.

What a king among men that pointer always had been! In the eyes of a gob greater than an admiral, higher than statesmen, rarer than champions of the ring, was his not the eye for which this whole complicated steel beauty of a ship had been built; his the nerve and quickness for which thirty thousand tons, twelve millions of dollars and five years of making had spread their august being?

For through the eye of a pointer alone could be found the reason for being of a battleship—he dotted the final I—rendered the ultimate account. To find him and prove him and his eye true the nation would spend a million dollars now in three days—puff it to glory in nasty brown smoke across the Cuban marshes.

To these gunners, clothed only in short pants, and naked from the waist up, the pointer was, in truth, the viscera of war's nature. He was the man behind the gun; he did the trick; the turn of his hand raised and depressed the muzzle of the gun; his searching vision sought with uncanny certainty the crossed squares of the dancing targets; his lean finger pulled the trigger that launched the thunderbolt.

And the Apache had no gun pointer.

In his customary place, up there where dwelt the gods Mars and Vulcan, where should be the worn saddle under the hood by the side of the shiny steel haunch, was instead a jumble of wires and tubes, antenna and straying ganglia poulticed with sticky plaster—a mere soulless mechanism.

They had been grumbling for weeks. Now, as the test came, and Cyrus faced them for the final showdown, they glowered at him.

Thus, doubtless, had glowered the weavers when the first weaving machine came to Lancashire. Thus had sneered the stout bowman of the army of Du Guescklin when the first blunderbuss appeared.

Cyrus realized the danger that lurked in this inescapable doubt among the turret crew he had picked and trained. They were loyal to him; they would fill their allotted tasks, but one slip on the part of any one of them might cause the umpire to order the firing stopped and the string would be ended and not only would the Apache lose her prize money and her place, but the automatic sight would be discredited.

There was one man, especially, he felt he must watch. It was the plugman, a new boy, just off the streets of Boston. The old plugman, a dependable fellow, well drilled in the ways of the turret, had unaccountably left the fleet before sailing from Hampton Roads.

"Rounding the starting boat! On the range in two minutes!" the word came down the deck.

Cyrus reached back and slipped the steel door. The latch clicked. Now they were locked in the turret. When next that door was opened and he could see daylight again his fate would be known—the fate of his invention—and that other fate, the dearer, truer fate.

He wondered how near was the Galatea. In the storm, of course, she could learn nothing at first hand.

The sour egg smell of the nitro-cellulose stimulated his nerves; the sweet, sick subtlety of the other lulled his jumping brain.

He looked to the umpire and nodded while he waited to hear the shrill blast of the whistle telling that time was about to commence. The umpire was there to see that no foolhardy chances were taken by this crew which might stand to win by possible foolhardiness. At the first sign of any untoward incident it was within his power to order the firing to cease, the door opened and that meant the end of the string, the end of the chance. In his hand he bore a little red-covered book filled with rules, infraction of any one of which meant disqualification.

It was to be a contest like those of Paavo Nurmi—against time, but with infinite complications, and—as the crew feared—the handicap of a blind, mechanical sight.

The chances of accident were multitudinous. If a spring broke, if a trunnion was mistakenly rusted, if the rifle barrel refused to accommodate the shell, if the shell did not instantly "take" on its brass collar, all inside might promptly be fit brothers for a squashed cockroach.

If there were a flare back there might be the slightest possible chance of escape for one or two. In that event, which is likely to occur at any discharge of the big gun, the thing to do was to hurl one's self, without breathing, down the ammunition hoist into the handling room. If the man got by with breaking only a few bones and the burning gas got to no more than thirty per cent of the surface of his skin he might survive. Yet no one could foretell just how the gas from the nitro-cellulose will get in its work. Sometimes it burns away the flesh and never touches the clothing; again it singes off the hair and never touches the flesh; again it burns the clothing off clean and leaves the man naked, but safe.

The stern, silent faces of the gun crew,

waiting for the signal; and resembling the faces of those seen at places of execution, seemed dimly conscious of this possibility.

Cyrus made a last mental estimate of them. They were six besides himself and the umpire, eight in all, inside the turret; the hoister, the tripper, two loaders, a rammer and a plugman, the trainers and pointers had been eliminated by his mechanism. His glance rested on the plugman. If only he could be sure of him!

The whistle!

"Take it easy, boys!" were Cyrus's last words.

From now on, every second, every split second counted. They had three minutes in which to revolutionize a world!

"Silence!" the cry rang like the lash of a whip from the gun captain, one of the loaders.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE REAL TEST.

AS a man drowns his life passes in review; in a flash of seconds he reviews years. At the supreme moment, also, the passage of the years is dissolved in a lambent glimpse.

Cyrus—even in the duration of the whistle's blast—saw himself back behind the counter in the shooting gallery at Linkersport, where he had never pulled a trigger, cleaning the guns, fixing the fresh loads for Jim Baggerly and the Saturday night gang, quietly observing their mannerisms—Jim's wasteful flourish as he waved the point of the weapon before he fired; Clint Newt's bad imitation of a Western desperado, Mr. Harper's leisurely pretense of elegant precision which seldom scored a point.

Here he was with the eyes of the nation represented by Admiral Vosmer on the flying bridge of the flagship a scant mile across the whipped water watching to see what his "blind gun" could do. The automatic sight he had dreamed back there in the dusty village shooting gallery!

So far he had climbed—a straight path, though tortuous, from atom to molecule, from monad up to man.

Then the gun captain's "Silence!" brought him to the present and the shoes he stood in. There was little he could do now but observe—and be ready for an emergency. It was up to the crew, and that crossed mass of wires.

What a word, he thought, is "silence"! Chosen to precede and close every important action on a battleship it seemed the key word of existence now. In it lay such potency of command, such suggestion of obedience is needed at the breech of hate, at the mouth of empire, whence proceeded the commands of a people.

Once a recruit saw fit to chaff his mate in a turret crew after that command "Silence" had been given. The gun captain stepped to him, without anger, and struck him a heavy blow across the face, with a gnarled, wet hand; the recruit carried the welt for a week; not a word was said, then or thereafter.

It was the rule of the turret that from the time of that command "Silence," no other word would be spoken until it was again given, except, "Commence firing!"

All this, and more, seethed in Cyrus Bullitt's brain in that premonitory instant before the great test, while the skeptical eyes of the fleet eagerly followed the speeding Apache as she swept on the range, full steam ahead.

"Commence firing!"

Rumbling from below. With a grating crash the automatic shutter dropped in the ammunition hoist, and the shell-car climbed its grinding steady way to the floor of the turret from the magazine deck below.

There had been no obvious movement to set things in action. Each man stood as carved in stone awaiting the coming moment of his well rehearsed duty. On all fell the graven quiet of the tomb.

As the car reached the level of the floor the hoistman reached down and locked it. At the same moment the plugman pulled open the breech of the great gun. The loader completed the passage from the car to the open breach with a ring of pounded brass. The tripper jerked down his lever and the huge shell, two-thirds of a ton in weight, dropped to its all but final resting place, blocking the momentarily clear sight

of that dazzlingly rifled bore leading to the open air.

They were taking it easy, like well sewn buttons in an old shirt. The umpire glanced at his wrist watch. Four seconds had elapsed since the command " Silence." A third of the loading was done. Nothing remarkable in time, but not bad.

The rammer held down on his long release as a cable gripman throws back his lever, and the smooth brass head forced the shell up until its soft copper rim " took " on the rifling of the gun. If the collar did not " take " it would be a miss-fire. And if the powder bags are placed wrong-end to there is danger of a hang-fire, which is as bad as a flareback, the chief cause of turret disasters.

The tripper pulled the lower lever from his car, and the first powder bag, looking like a sack of flour and studded with lumps where the sticks of nitro protruded, fell behind the shell. Another lever and the second was in.

The brass rammer forced them close to the shell. Then the plugman gave a huge wrench to the breech and its mushroom head slid up softly on the powder bags. The loader slipped a primer in the touch-hole, and then folded down a tiny piece of steel forming the electrical connection.

All stood at attention. Everything was ready for the first shot.

The umpire looked at his watch. Nine seconds. No one had hurried. Not a single quick motion had been made, except the plugman's pull on the breech, and yet so much had been done in nine seconds. The result of months of planning and rehearsing each movement, each turn of a hand.

This was usually where the pointer and and his assistant took charge. On the other vessels old fashioned like the Comanche, it was up to the pointer to wrestle with that vast piece of steel until the lines on his telescopic sight crossed, and then pull the trigger. Usually a moment of tensest suspense, of dependence on human fallibility.

But not now. No human brain, no human hand was there to release that thunderbolt, to press the trigger that would hurl it ten miles across the water. Instead those crossed wires, listening like a seismograph for an earthquake, infallibly recording the dancing variations of the distant target, automatically making allowances for all the forced movements of the ship, foretelling the height of the coming heaves from the depth of the last pitch, discounting the throb of the propellers, cunningly estimating even the windage, was training the gun.

And had been doing all that while the load was being made!

Therein lay the trick of it. Therein lay the hope of cutting in two the time required for a shot.

The average time required a human pointer after the load was ready before he could fire his gun was twelve to fifteen seconds. Green ones floundered about it for minutes. Only after years of practice could they get into the ten-second class.

Now the umpire in the Apache's turret was startled when, within a second and a half of the moment when the loader placed the electrical contact on the primer in the touch-hole, the great haunch fell through the floor, the rifle barrel leaped like the spring of a grasshopper, until its crest was as low as its belly lay, and a low " boom!" shook the stately moving fortress to her keel.

His wrist watch showed sixteen seconds only gone. That was cutting the usual time almost in two. The invention was a success—provided the shell made the hit.

But the action went on. The precise and silent crew were working for the full string. None of them knew as yet what the umpire knew, and even he doubted if the gun had been more than fired—if it had been a hit, too!

In that event, my lords, this is revolution!

The formal announcement from a courtier in a former awed moment of history floated through a nimble brain, while the action went on—?

The plugman unlocked the breech even as it lay back on its trunnion, waiting modestly for its next charge after as graceful a spring as a tigress ever made on a moonlit road, feline with stealthy swiftness, decisive with oiled piston strokes. He pulled it open with a fling.

Cyrus watched the gesture narrowly. There was something amateurish about it, an excess of zeal. He sensed that danger lay there—in the plugman.

The loader leaped across the chasm of the ammunition hoist, flipped up the tiny guard that broke the electrical connection, extracting the used primer which fell to the deck, while his foot flipped it aside safely.

Automatically the air-blast swept down the rifle. There was a swift escape as of steam as it blew away gas and stray powder grains. The egg-smell of the nitro; the sweetness of the evaporating ether spread through the chamber.

Cyrus for an instant closed his eyes. It seemed a fragrance of mingled honeysuckle and lilac had wafted him far away—on the magic carpet.

But for an instant only. This supreme moment of his life was in duration of one hundred and eighty seconds. How dare he grant one second of it to dreams and memories!

Again the grind from the hoist; the shutter opened; the car appeared with the second shell. Again the routine—the easy working of the old buttons in the well worn holes. And then the second shot—in a saving of two seconds, this time, the umpire noted.

Cyrus, with swift dawning apprehension, brought his eyes back to the overzealous plugman. He, alone of all the crew, seemed excited. His hands were twitching; his eyes blinking; he was alternately watching the umpire, the loader, Cyrus, the sinking and rising of the great steel haunch, and—a fascinating, but dangerous indiscretion—was looking down the ammunition hoist toward the powder magazine.

The chief function of the umpire was to prevent any possible alteration of the routine which might permit alien particles to get down to the magazine. At the first sign of such danger it was his duty to order "Cease firing!"

The discharged primer from the second shot fell to the deck, and was flipped aside by the boot of the loader, but not so far aside as the first. And what was it—hideous malice or a case of nervous fidgets—which caused the plugman to edge toward it with his tap-tap-tapping foot, along the steel deck, a quarter of an inch at a time?

Cyrus saw the foot get nearer and nearer. Another second and it might flip the burned primer, perhaps not wholly extinguished, down the hoist into the magazine. He could not speak. To do so would break the law of the turret and automatically terminate the run and end their Apache's chance and the invention's opportunity. If the primer fell down the hoist the umpire would be obliged to stop the string. Even if he saw it, perilously near the verge of the chute, he might stop the run—and be justified in doing so!

Cyrus had a second to think, an instant to act. If he took the place of the plugman he ran a chance of being disqualified by the umpire for that little red book of rules provided that no officer could take the place of a member of the crew.

Yet Cyrus decided to chance that. If the umpire let him go on it would be enough. If penalized later he could fight it out with the board of review.

Without a word he touched the plugman on the shoulder, motioned him back and took his place. As he did so Cyrus reached down and picked up the bit of burned primer, now only an inch from the aperture of the hoist. A tiny spark glowed in its frayed end. He rubbed this out between thumb and finger, stuffed the primer in his pocket and reached in, in place of the retired plugman, to unlock the breech after the third shot.

By so narrow a margin had Tenflair's manipulation been thwarted.

The umpire nodded approval. Thank God! He did not know his rules as well as Cyrus. Carrying a book of them in his hand proved that!

The fourth and the fifth and the sixth shots were fired! As they prepared for the seventh a subtle elation came to the crew and a broad grin passed from phiz to phiz. They had equaled the Comanche's run now—if they were only hits!

Respect for the automatic sight increased.

Meanwhile, its inventor went on as plugman, and his nearer presence gave added impetus to the work, now proceeding with

the serene delight of a Geneva clock, vastly complicated, but of a single purpose and a single thought.

The seventh shot and still not the call of time! Another record. Merciful Powers! If they are only hits!

There at the trunnion of the gun less than anywhere on the ship, could be felt the force of the discharge. Physical power unmatchable was being loosed there—even the backlash held the turret in a paroxysm of adjustment—and yet the inventor of the miracle rode as if on wings.

In storm centers is the calm, Cyrus reflected, while waiting to minister to the breech of his charge. As Disraeli said, the chief joy in being prime minister is the certainty one has that nothing, nothing is happening on the inside.

The tenth shot! The eleventh!

Then, as Cyrus pulled the breech open to prepare for the twelfth shot, and as the hoists began grinding to bring up the twelfth shell, the harsh whistle sounded along the decks.

"Silence!" came from the gun captain. The crew relaxed and stood at attention.

"Time!" cried the umpire.

"Cease firing!" concluded the gun captain as he turned and unlocked the door.

A second later the crew tumbled to the deck, smoke grimed, and, for all their taking it easy and working without haste or friction, raining sweat. They turned on the abashed plugman while they looked aloft, through the wind-driven rain, to read the first report from the semaphore.

They well knew that no turret ever had run off a string of eleven sixteen inch shots in three minutes before, but—were any of them hits?"

None of the crew dared believe it.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AN UNSEEN TARGET.

CYRUS felt the rush of the rain on his face with relief. He leaned against the side of the turret for support.

The umpire said to him, solicitously, "Say, old man, your eyes look like two burned holes in a blanket. Better let me get you some coffee." And he ran for the wardroom.

In an instant Cyrus was the center of a mob. The whole fourth ward pelted on him like college freshmen. He felt the enthusiasm was a little out of place—out there on the open deck in the rain, with the smoke of the big guns clinging around and the echoes of the last shot hardly gone.

But they embraced him; they threw him to their shoulders as he had seen gridiron heroes elevated after a close and victorious game against the army. "Three cheers for the Old Sphinx!" They came with a will. And "A Tiger!"

He felt so tired and seemed in a daze. He hardly knew he was in the air; he hardly knew he again had touched the deck. What had happened?

In that three minutes, a hundred and eighty seconds, with the meagerest physical exertion, without once speaking, he had lived over all ancient, present and future history, his past life and struggles, his hopes, ambitions, achievements—his dreams, romance, love, desire—and his eyes, incidentally, in purely mechanical precision, had at the same time noted everything done by each member of the crew, while he had beaten the umpire to the one surprise action of the run.

Billy Vosmer came through the press and saw his plight and put an arm around him and called, softly, "Cy, you Old Sphinx, you ripped the lining out of her—a goal from field and ten home runs in the last inning! But it's taken the gimp out of you! Here! You soft baby!"

And Billy seized the thermos bottle from the hands of the returning umpire and poured hot coffee down Cyrus's throat.

As he revived, partly from the hot coffee within, partly from the cold rain dashing on his face from without, but, perhaps, mostly from the fierce rush of exuberant joy from his comrades, he saw now it was not just the fourth ward honoring him with kiddish celebration.

Here came the navigator and the engineer and behind them the executive officer, almost running. They grasped his hand and spoke excitedly, even as ensigns, while

some one pushed him under the forecastle hood, out of the wet, alongside the crew's lounging room.

There, the men, among them petty officers crowded about, while, a moment later, pushing a way through as if he wore no uniform and were lord over all, came the captain to reach forth his hand as he said, feelingly, "Well, Bullitt, we're proud of you! It's a great day for the Apache and a great day for you—and the navy!"

In the eyes of the captain was that same awe that could be seen even in the face of the youngest jacky, even in the scared, wondering countenance of the disgraced plugman.

It was as though they all had seen a miracle—had touched the hem of the garment of authority.

"But," Cyrus broke through, "what's the score? Can't someone tell me?"

"Don't know yet," said the captain, "the spotters are out with the steamers. From the bridge it looked like every shot a hit—but the wind and rain are too stiff. Have to wait!"

"You just naturally tore those targets to flinders!" Billy cried. "Sunk 'em—fore an' aft!"

Every one grinned. For the moment discipline was gone. Rank was forgotten. Democracy was supreme. A jacky laughed joyously in the face of the captain, and the captain grinned back indulgently at the jacky.

Only for a sober quartermaster at the wheel the Apache might have been rolling in the trough of the waves, and would have suffered a penalty for getting off the course.

With great difficulty Cyrus led Billy aside. "How did you come through with the helicopter?" he demanded.

"Wind tore the old well out by the roots and landed her in the middle of the bay!" Billy laughed. "Never got a chance to try to fly."

Cyrus's face fell. He was intensely disappointed.

"Why, that was a hurricane!" Billy apologized, "the original imitation of billy-blue hell—and no place for Billy's helicopter!"

The ordnance officer, nowever, could have been no more downcast if his chief invention had failed. "Then you didn't go up at all?" Billy shook his head.

At that moment vast cheers began rumbling through the passages, along the decks and over the turrets of the Apache. They began at crescendo and yet mounted.

"Must be the report from the spotters. Let's see!" Billy led the way toward the bridge.

Part way they were met by a new rush of badly demoralized men, almost hysterical with shouting. From their midst the umpire, as red-faced and partisan as any other, now that his impartial duty was done, called to Cyrus:

"Semaphore says—Eleven shots—ten hits—seven bull's eyes!"

Pandemonium took a new hold.

Until some one tried to calm it by calling attention to firing on the Kiowa. "What's the flagship doing?" all asked at once.

From the end of the admiral's bridge a three pounder firing blanks, the piece reserved only for salutes, was barking. After the boom of the big guns it sounded like the yelp of a busy Pekingese in the wake of a mastiff.

They counted the shots until they got beyond seventeen.

"Gee!" said Billy, "they're making you a vice-admiral!"

They mounted to twenty-one. "The President!" Billy shouted.

Still the three pounder kept on—to twenty-five—thirty! and was still going.

"The flagship's gone nutty, too!"

Out in front of the turret the gun crews, still only in short pants, but inspired by plentiful coffee, if not by anything a wee bit stronger, was executing a war dance, accompanied by shrill cries, as their comrades accompanied them, crying "Listen to the big chiefs of the Apache!"

From the bridge the captain looked down tolerantly. He would let this reaction take its course—for the day, at least. Had not those boys just earned a thousand dollars of prize money, as well as five dollars a month each added to their pay for a triumph of stern discipline and of exquisite manual dexterity—to say nothing of placing their ship

for all time in the honor roster of the American navy?

And then—as the jubilation seemed swelling into its peak—there came along the wireless a sinister crackle and sizz. For the battle practice there was no inter-fleet wireless at work. This was outside. Not an officer but paused to get the signal.

"S O S!" it read, and repeated. The call of distress. A vessel in peril.

"Yacht Galatea!" the sizzling dot and dash went on puncturing the festivity, "hit by big shell; sinking by the head in fifty fathoms—north roadstead—help! Help!"

The Galatea! Raby!

The moment was again one for action throughout the fleet. The flagship started three currents of orders, to make sure—the ardois, the semaphore, and the wireless. She ordered the cruiser in the roadstead to stand by; told both target steamers to put about and force all steam ahead for the scene of the accident; and ordered two launches stationed at the ends of the course as starting markers also to respond.

The crack destroyer, Tecumseh, capable of forty knots, fortunately had steam up, and was ordered to the roadstead though she lay twenty-five miles off to the south.

It did not seem possible, with all that succor so near, that there could be danger to life.

Billy was with Cyrus when the message came and he exclaimed, "Good God! Raby's on that boat—with the Laimvirs."

"I know!" said Cyrus, "and the message said, 'Hit by big shell.' How could that be?"

"Must be a mistake!" Billy insisted. A covert glance revealed that he tactfully realized what this would mean to Cyrus—that a shot from his turret, one of these record-making shots, had been the means of sending the pleasure craft to the bottom—a horrible catastrophe to conclude an epoch-making victory!

Cyrus was thinking the same thing, as was disclosed by the blanched look which speedily returned to his lean face.

"Impossible!" Billy continued. "The yacht couldn't get behind the targets—why, with the cruiser posted, and all!"

"But the rain obscured even the target from us, and the velocity of the wind was seventy miles!"

"Still it couldn't be! The marshes are over there for twenty miles! No yacht could climb into them—even if it tried!"

"The roadstead is beyond—not more than thirty miles from us."

"The sixteen-inch shell doesn't carry that far."

Cyrus shook his head sadly. "Yes, it does," he corrected, "on the ricochet—and a spent shell would make a yacht into kindling wood!"

"Well," Billy determined to be cheerful, "Raby is a good swimmer!"

Neither dared voice the thought which was uppermost in the mind of each—what if the shot had hit amidships, among the passengers?

The inaction of waiting to know about a rescue and the conditions found was too much for Cyrus. Suddenly he excused himself from Billy, without any explanation and sought the captain in his cabin. He was greeted with most amiable courtesy as seemed due the victor in such contest as that just closed.

"I want your permission, sir," he asked, forthwith, "to take up the plane on the quarter-deck."

The captain was disposed to grant almost any request from this source at this time, but he could not help making an obvious protest, "but you're not an aviator."

"I'm the inventor."

"The regulations do not permit any one to take off in a plane except tested aviators."

"The regulations do not permit the inventor of the automatic sight to take the place of the plugman during target practice, but that is what he did, sir."

There! Had he spilled the beans?

The captain exclaimed, incredulously: "Did you do that?"

Cyrus assented with a nod.

"But why be an aviator—in this storm, especially?"

"To get to the sinking yacht, sir. Don't you see?" The anguish in his tone was unmistakable.

"But, my dear Bullitt," the captain protested, "you could do little with a plane. The flagship has already sent every relief

the fleet has. Wouldn't I be exceeding my authority very far to let you out on a harum-scarum jaunt like this?"

"I don't think so, sir. I can run that plane, and in this storm it may be that no vessel can find the yacht, especially if she's gone down and there are only the survivors, perhaps swimming in the water."

The captain pursed his lips. He was about to shake his head in refusal when Cyrus approached nearer, and asked pleadingly: "As a personal favor—the only one I'll ever ask, sir?"

"You make it hard, old man! Your life is too valuable to the service. I have no right to permit you to risk it needlessly."

What could be more soothing than to be called "old man" by a gray-haired captain, sole responsible master of a thousand lives and a ship worth twelve millions of dollars?

But it did not divert Cyrus. "I beg of you," he pleaded, "grant me permission and save me the error of disobedience!"

The captain laughed. "And let the reprimand be on my head! Well, Bullitt, perhaps the commander of the Apache does owe you something to-day. I'll take the chance. Go to it! Only be sure of one thing—come back yourself, even if you leave the plane."

CHAPTER XXIX.

TO THE RESCUE.

CYRUS ran to Billy's cabin. "Come!" he cried. "The skipper's given me permission to fly my helicopter."

"*Your* helicopter? Mine."

"Give me your helmet."

"What's the idea?"

"I'm going up." Cyrus helped himself to the aviator's leather helmet hanging at the head of Billy's bunk, and then to the leather jacket.

"But the well's blown away. She won't rise."

"She's still a plane, isn't she?"

"Never dived off that way. She'll do a nose dive into the briny!"

"All right. She's got her hydro-bottoms."

Accoutred, Cyrus led the way to the quarter-deck, while Billy followed growling. On the way Cyrus calmly ordered. "Get your crew."

"What for?"

"To shove me off."

"Are you loony, too?"

"No. I'm going after Raby."

"The cruiser's there long ago," her brother insisted, though such was Cyrus's assurance that he sent word for'ard for the four men of the helicopter crew.

When they arrived they found Cyrus in the cockpit of the helicopter and waiting for them. "Now, boys," said he, "I want you to run this plane the length of the quarter-deck, and shove her off at a thirty degree angle away from the propeller, for I don't want to get mixed up there if I happen to strike a wave."

"Aye, sir!" they answered.

The rails being down there was nothing to prevent the plane sliding off clear, but she had no wheels, and the crew captain asked, respectfully: "Will her boats carry her crost decks, sir?"

"If you soap them," Cyrus suggested.

"Aye, sir."

A moment later a jacky came with a bucket of soft soap with which the hydro runners were liberally anointed. Then, using them as runners, the crew got behind and gave the plane a run down the deck, choosing a moment when the Apache was pitching for'ard so as to get advantage of the rear pitch as it reversed.

A few seconds later and "Darius Green and his flying machine" dived laterally off the stern of the battleship.

They went to the very surface of the water. The observers on deck thought they had actually gone under, so high were the waves, but the next moment the wings caught the air. The plane recovered and was off.

In ten minutes Cyrus was above the marshes beyond the targets which he could see abandoned by the steamers that had gone to the rescue.

However, these steamers had been obliged to make a detour of fifteen miles to get out of the bay. They could not go right across the marshes as Cyrus could. As he rose to fifteen hundred meters to get a good view he could see them far down at the point,

just rounding the bend, not even in the roadstead yet.

Beyond, ten miles away, he saw the pitch black smoke of the destroyer, chugging its way to the rescue.

The scout cruiser was nowhere in sight. Perhaps she had been blown away by the storm.

But where was the Galatea? He could see her nowhere.

He followed the most obvious method of reaching her—by going in a straight line directly in the path that must have been pursued by the shell. He covered the probably thirty miles of the ricochet in twenty minutes.

The rescuing vessels, having to travel twice and three times his distance, and at a quarter or less of his speed, seemed crawling along on the surface like bugs.

One thought only ran through his head—that his gun had fired at Raby! What a sardonic conclusion to so glorious a day!

It was still not four o'clock. In fact, seven bells had been rung as he cast off. Yet the darkness was such with the lowering clouds that it seemed evening was at hand. He must make all haste to locate the lost vessel within an hour or two, or sundown would really render all further search too difficult.

He looked about the cockpit for lights. There was no spot—only a few incandescent bulbs over the running board, and above the gas tanks.

Then he slowed down and turned at right angles, and flew sou'-sou'west. Already he had come thirty-five miles and there was no sign of life below.

This must be over the roadstead. He could see now clearly how it had happened. The Galatea, thinking herself safe outside the bay, had hugged close in the hope of being near enough to run in, perhaps, after the practice was over and pick up some news, although no civilian boat was permitted to come in direct touch during battle practice. The storm, however, had upset her calculations and she had drifted nearer the separating marshes than she had thought, without knowing, doubtless, either, that a big shell could ricochet thirty miles or that she was that near the fleet.

The wind was down by half—not more than forty miles now. But enough of a blow, at that. The rain had petered out to a fine mist. There was even promise of sun before night. He dropped down to the five hundred meter level.

He could see the destroyer now. She was not more than five or six miles off, coming head on, a fine bone in her teeth. He would have to work fast if he wanted to be the first—yet where was the wreck?

He dropped to two hundred meters.

Weaving back and forth over the roadstead he combed the trough of every wave with his glass. He saw seaweed, a few empty cans probably thrown overboard from the supply ships, an old tree trunk—and that was all.

The destroyer was three miles away. The thing had resolved itself into a race between him and that destroyer.

He dropped to fifty meters, and skimmed over the waves like a swallow. Now he saw more. What looked like a tree trunk was a long wooden settee, covered with some cloth material. What he had thought tin cans were upturned chairs with woven rush bottoms.

And the blobs of seaweed proved to be human beings surrounded by life preservers!

The destroyer was only a mile and a half off now—and coming on at forty miles an hour, easily.

He dived in among the seaweed and came to rest on his boats, like an old father duck settling in the midst of his flock in the middle of a mill pond.

The nearest preserver carried a sailor who paddled a rapid way to the side of the converted hydroplane. Cyrus waved him aside, "there's half a dozen vessels on the way in—be here in five minutes!" he explained, "let me get the women and children first."

"No children!" called the sailor.

"How many women?"

"Five! All went down—first crack—in the lifeboat."

"Lifeboat sunk, too?"

"Yep!"

Cyrus would not accept this. Perhaps this sailor was too eager for a quick dry berth. Cyrus turned over his engines, and

skimmed on a few hundred meters. He came to another clump of seaweed. It proved to be the engineer and an oiler.

They repeated the same story. Cyrus told them to wait for the destroyer, which now could be seen clearly, less than a mile off. Even as the ship appeared the sun also came, burning a way through the black clouds. The mist lifted. A flood of tropic light descended on the sea.

As the destroyer hove to, swinging over an eight-oar launch, Cyrus rose, stretched his legs, and scanned the surface with his glasses.

He saw something move a little distance away—an overturned table, it seemed. He cupped his hands and called to the destroyer, "Tecumseh! Ensign Bullitt, the Apache! The captain's orders—pick up these men, and follow me!"

He turned the plane toward the table.

Stretched across it, unconscious, but tied on around her waist by a long scarf, lay Raby, her hands dangling in the water. He guided the plane alongside and half-lifted, half-dragged her into the cockpit.

In a few minutes, under his skillful first aid, she revived. His arm was about her at the moment, for he was pressing the water out of her lungs from the lumbar region of her back. She subsided into them gently and laid her head against his breast.

Later, as they were winging back to the fleet, across the marshes, but not at a hundred miles an hour, for there was no use courting an accident now that the danger was over, she said to him.

"It was the sixth shot!"

He was thinking of the same thing—their code. "Bessarabia Vosmer," it ran, "will you be my wife?"

"Our code! You didn't forget? You could forgive?"

She was extremely impolite, for she made no answer to any of the questions; that is, none directly. She merely nestled more snugly against his arm.

Both of his arms were occupied at the moment. The operation of the plane, it seemed, required them. Too bad.

He was very much troubled. Of course she could not forgive him. How could he expect it when he did not deserve it? At any rate, she was safe. There was much in that—everything!

Finally, just before they left the marshes, almost to the fleet, he said to her, "Was it the sixth shot that got you?"

"No," she dreamily murmured, "you got me!"

Even then he did not understand. It was in mathematics that he was expert.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE FRUITS OF VICTORY.

THE semaphores were busy for a long time after Cyrus landed again safely near the Apache and had been taken, accompanying Raby, to the deck. In short order, however, a mahogany lined, brass-railed launch put off from the side of the Kiowa. It had four small brass stars near its prow—the admiral's gig.

Out of it presently and up the sea ladder of the Apache, for no stairs were down during battle practice, climbed an officer with gold aigulettes draped across his left shoulder and under his arm pit. It was Flag Lieutenant Moore.

The captain of the Apache greeted him as he stepped on the quarterdeck.

"The compliments of the admiral!" said Lieutenant Moore, saluting. "He asks that I return immediately to the flagship with Miss Vosmer, Ensign Vosmer and Ensign Bullitt."

The captain gave orders to have the word taken to the cabins, and then remarked to Lieutenant Moore, while they waited, "Give my compliments to the admiral, and say that I regard the sending of the two officers of my ship as merely in the nature of a friendly loan, and that I wish that I might say as much for Miss Vosmer."

"Aye, sir!" the flag lieutenant touched his cap.

A moment later Cyrus and Billy appeared, escorting Raby who had been obliged for the sake of getting dry to don one of her brother's suits of clothes, which she hid under a long oilskin.

Shortly after she was safe in her father's arms.

Billy and Cyrus came into the admiral's dining room for dinner. Before it was served the admiral said, "Bullitt, it looks like I'll have to approve the department's order for your automatic sight as standard equipment for all sixteen-inch guns. To-day settles that."

"Thank you, sir."

"It ought to make you a rich man."

"I don't know about that, sir, but it will make me a free man."

"How free?"

He told them, as simply as he could, of his father's estate and his certainty now of clearing it from the claim of Banker Harper.

"So that's what you meant!" Raby gasped, "why I thought it was something really dreadful." She turned to her father, "Like his being in the brig, for which he wasn't to blame at all, as you told me."

The admiral nodded. Then she turned on Billy. "And I think it about time," she exclaimed, "that I should know the truth of that demerit that Mr. Bullitt took in the academy for some one else's gambling. Who was it he saved?"

"It's a gala night and a time for confession, and I'm going to tell—whatever Cy says!" Billy asserted, though Cyrus was gravely shaking his head in an effort to keep him quiet.

"I was the gambler—penny ante—seven cents winner—if all the horrible truth must be known—but my marks wouldn't stand another black one—and Cy took it for me like a perfect pal!"

The twinkle in the eyes of the admiral indicated that he would not utter any words of admonishment at this late date. Billy turned to him saying, "Father, I guess I'm the ugly duckling among all the Vosmers. I just skinned through the academy—never handled a thing that came my way—even to-day I missed out with the helicopter and Cy comes along and takes it out of my hand and makes himself a double hero with it. Gee! I don't believe my future in the service is very bright."

"Buck up, son," the admiral responded, "one of the highest and rarest qualifications in a naval officer is the ability to pick men. You've made good already by picking a good one—there!" He indicated their guest.

Raby would not let Billy have the credit. "I picked him!" she insisted, "the first day I saw him, in a room just like this on the Kansas, before father was an admiral, sneaking a chance to read a stupid French book about guns."

"How about that, Bullitt?" the admiral inquired.

Cyrus, blushing, replied: "I would be proud if any member of the Vosmer family might pick me, sir." His glance fell before Raby's, but he looked bravely at the admiral, continuing, "It was you who gave me my chance, sir!"

A little later when they were alone Raby demanded to know why he was so partial to her father. Cyrus, still very stupid, tried to tell her, and she sighed deeply. Really, she hardly knew how she was going to bring him around to the condition which seemed essential to her peace of mind.

In desperation she hit on the gambling episode—a thing in itself far more desperate. "I am sorry you are not a good gambler," she said.

"Oh! But I am," he corrected, "when the stakes are worth while!"

"The sky the limit—eh? Then I'll confess. I made a big bet on your turret to-day!"

"Fine! Then you won! I'm delighted."

"Well—ask me what I bet. Don't you want to know?"

"Of course."

"Myself!"

He gave no sign of comprehending. "What! You do not consider the stakes high enough!" she cried.

"But I don't understand—"

"I agreed to marry a man if your turret did not shoot over five shots in the string."

His mouth fell open. He appeared frightened, and gasped, "who was the man."

"Percy Tenflair."

"But if you had lost."

"Then poison—for either Percy or me—or both!"

The excess of it made him laugh. "I see how you keep your father and Billy and

every one else guessing," he replied, but he was soberly reflecting, just the same.

Then he turned on her with, "Was that after I had run away from you—out there under the honeysuckle trellis?"

She nodded her head slowly.

He was breathing deeply. He almost believed the mingled odors of the lilac and the honeysuckle were descending on them again; enveloping them; that the sap was running down the boles of the trees; the seeds bursting the earth with the force of their germination.

"I felt so desperate I was nearly mad!" he ejaculated.

"I know!" She nodded her head affirmatively.

"Oh!" he exclaimed almost in despair, "do you know everything?"

Again she nodded slowly and came very close to him, and laid her head up simply against his tunic and he placed his arm about her gently. "Then you know," he went on slowly, "what it meant for me to have those shots run straight to-day—what every shot was saying?"

"Not every one," she mildly corrected, "what did they mean after the seventh?"

Now his arm pressed her more closely as he murmured, "Please, please, please be my wife—and repeat—again—and again!"

He lifted her hand and kissed it.

"That," she said, "is for those to whom I am engaged to be engaged and agree to hold as brothers always."

He pressed his lips devoutly to her forehead.

"And that," she added smiling, "is for captains and admirals to whom I agree to remain always as a dear daughter."

Finally, when at length he seemed to have gained a measure of her real intention, and found her lips, she agreed, "That is just for you—just—yes!"

THE END

THE NATIONAL GAME

IT used to be a Yankee game, in these United States,
An' we owned it all, from Paterson to Yuba;
But they've copped it in Japan, b'gosh! The little yellow skates!
An' they've started up a trolley league in Cuba.

I can see the day a comin' when you're sore about your dough,
An' you up an' ask the manager to raise ye,
An' he'll confidently tell you that he thinks he'll let you go—
'Cause he's signed a cheaper player up—in Asia!

For the scouts 'll be a rootin' on the edges o' the earth,
An' recruits 'll come from Singapore an' Siam;
They'll watch the man from Borneo an' judge o' what he's worth—
An' perhaps he'll be as good a man as I am!

They'll sign a Turk, an Eskimo, a Cossack, an' a Jap,
An' a lot o' the other funny-lookin' creatures;
An' because the battin'-order is an animated map,
Why—the feature of the game 'll be the features!

Edward S. Morrissey.

Songs and Tongs

By CYRIL B. EGAN

TO most people, ice—whether in a glass, or on a pond, or in an ice-box—is the symbol of emotional frigidity; but there are those—one or two, to be nearly exact—to whom the frosty souvenirs of winters past are more expressive of the springtime of the heart than all the flowers that ever bloomed.

For once upon a time there was an ice man—a nice ice man, an extraordinarily nice ice man. He was tall and slim and distingué, with a handsome melancholy countenance like Dante, and a luscious tenor voice like—yes, some said like Caruso—and such romantically sad dark eyes! Also he had a way about him.

He brought charm and grace to the prosy business of delivering ice; there was a deftness about his manner of depositing the frosty cubes in the refrigerator— Well, no other ice man could do it like him!

And always as he worked, he hummed or sang little snatches from Italian opera in a voice of pure gold. Which was a reason why everybody in his neighborhood took ice from Giuseppe Spumone, and why Giuseppe was fast becoming the most prosperous dealer in ice, coal and wood for miles around.

Then there was a lady of the scullery. Very pretty, too. Despite big feet. Hulda her name was. Hulda Hucklefennish. Orphan girl brought up in a convent orphanage. Sweet, though more or less inarticulate. Graduated into service. Had obsolete tastes. Would rather read Bertha Clay than go to the movies; preferred the Dantesque beauty of Giuseppe Spumone to the sheikish attractions of Rodolph Valentino.

O, dear!

That was what she would sigh when he was gone.

For he stayed so briefly, and came so early.

O, dear—why did not ice men come in the evening?

Lord knows they said little enough to

each other, these two: just sort of mooned about—he humming his little operas—she leaning on her mop, saying nothing, looking books.

For they were not sufficiently masters of the language to speak pretticisms one to another; and to indulge in the ordinary converse of ice man to scullery maid would have been to ruin a kitchen lyric.

He would say: "'Allo!" in greeting; she would respond briefly: "'Ullo—twenty cents' worth t'-day."

Then he would begin the business of delivering his ice. It was amazing how long it took Spumone, the skilled ice man, to make this one delivery. No other refrigerator ever received such loving care and lavish attention.

For first Giuseppe would take out all the refrigerable articles; then he would look at the drain-pipe to see if it were functioning properly; then he would drop the ice into its proper repository; and then he would place the food and bottles back in their proper places. And all the while he would be humming or singing little snatches from operas, or then again one of the simple Italian folk songs, such as:

O Marie! O Marie!

That, by the way, was the name that Hulda had adopted in service. So the song fell doubly sweet upon her ears. She felt sure the ditty was directed at herself. For always on his exit, he would look over his shoulder, and direct at her one of his sadly romantic, dark-eyed Italian glances.

For a while that was as far as his manifestations of ardor went. But Hulda Marie was content. She had imagination. The glance of his eye and the song on his tongue carried her a long way.

O Marie! O Marie!

Surely, she would keep repeating, by Marie he must mean herself. Else why would he always have sung the same thing? All day the air would run in her brain.

Then one day Giuseppe came bringing a rose. Imagine an ice man bringing a rose! It was a warm spring morning.

"You lika da rose?" he queried, gallantly gesturing to his flowering buttonhole after he had thumped his daily diamond on the floor.

"M-m-m-m-m," assented Hulda, clasping her hands in anticipatory rapture.

"Here—you take!" Generous deflowering of buttonhole. Light contact of fingers. Oh, thrill sublime! But business is business. Ice must be delivered. Clink of milk bottle, thump of ice on tin, clang of ice-tongs, slam of the refrigerator door; all the while —"*O Marie!*" Then Giuseppe going—"Happy East' day!"

Happy day, it was. Maybe too happy. Ecstasy. Swoonlike rapture. Day dreamings of roses and ice and dark, Italian eyes. Which was probably the reason why the coffee for *madame's* late breakfast came to the table that morning so undilutably strong.

After that, the kitchen courting moved forward with giant strides. The weather waxing warm and warmer, Giuseppe's visits became delightfully frequent. He brought more roses—roses and diamonds—dripping diamonds, set in tongs of tinkling steel. It got so that the heart of Hulda melted at the sight of the stuff which froze refrigerators.

Progress—leaps and bounds! With spring, the tongue of Hulda Marie loosened. She now essayed sprightly comment on the weather, such as "Nice mornin'," or "D'ye think it 'll rain?" and one day even waxed so bold as to ask: "How d'ye feel this mornin', Giuseppe?"

Giuseppe felt well. Birdlike he answered with a song.

O Marie! O Marie!

And before he went, he asked, jangling his tongs to hide his concern:

"You like—movela pitch?"

Yes, Hulda liked movela pitch.

"M-m-m-m-m!" she assented. She did not tell him she preferred Bertha Clay. Evidently something to be gained by liking movela pitch.

"Me and you go movela pitch?"

"M-m-m-m-m!" Hulda swung from side to side.

"Maybe go t'night?"

Hulda nodded. How lucky this should be her night off! And Giuseppe went on his ice-vending way, singing like spring.

Movela pitch. Lotsa fun. Not the pictures so much, but what goes with them.

There is an art to attending movela pitch with one's best girl. First one concentrates on the picture itself. Great interest manifested in weekly news. Hearty laughter. Less attention to the travelogue. Travelogue sort of dull. The young man finds it his duty to provide interest. His arm slips about her shoulder; one of his hands rests on hers— Oh, well, travel pictures not bad.

The feature is a belated film having to do with the World War. But the war is over. Fresh urge for couples to provide own entertainment. Her head reclines on his shoulder. He hums with the music. On the screen the German army is being hewed to pieces. Close-up of the Kaiser snarling his discomfiture. Who cares? The war is over. And spring, with love, has come to the heart of Giuseppe and his Hulda.

Giuseppe was magnificent that night—a trifle gaudy, but nevertheless radiantly and colorfully superb. With his bright green tie, his purple socks, tan suit, checkered silk shirt and nobby pearl-gray bowler, he was a prismatic division of his own winelike, Italian sunshine. Like a Sousarian band on the ears of a monk who has been sunk for years in a cloistered silence, so burst the festively iridescent Giuseppe upon the sight of Hulda Marie.

Hulda Marie was attired not quite so dazzlingly, her frock being merely one of her mistress's discards fashioned after a model by Poiret. It was plain from the disparity of color schemes that *madame's* dressmaker and the tailor of Giuseppe Spumone would have been poor team-workers.

Hulda Marie, realizing all too painfully the inadequacy of her garb, felt that she must look very drab indeed beside this pink of sartorial perfection. However, majesty was indulgent, and smiled on the queen consort as if she were the prettiest dressed lady at the movela pitch.

After movela pitch—the resplendent interior of an ice cream parlor. A pleasure dome of rare device. Gay pianola, glittering chandeliers, myriad mirrors; and Giuseppe's highly polished hair shining in the bright lights, and Giuseppe's dark eyes gazing fondly at one across the marble-topped table. This was better than Bertha Clay!

Giuseppe had a banana split.

Hulda Marie took a pineapple temptation.

The pianola tinkle-tinkled merrily away. Giuseppe between mouthfuls, hummed an accompaniment, and looked soulfully at Hulda. Nice ice man!

They walked home in moonlight—slowly—very slowly. Their pace just one jot faster than funeral, ten jots ahead of a snail. Yet, though pleasantly and moonily melancholy, they were far from being funereal. Oh, dear, why did they ever have to reach home? Hulda sighed.

"G' night!"

"*Bambino, a rivederce,*" he hummed. Then actually he leaned over the gate and kissed her.

"*Bambino!*" And he was off on his way—still humming—always he was humming.

Gone! Oh, dear! Nice ice man!

II.

DINNER at six, prefaced by a deal of fuss. *Madame* was entertaining an impresario. Not that it was the first time that *madame* had entertained an impresario. Indeed, many were the musical potentates, managerial and otherwise, that had graced the *madame's* table.

Her home was a modest enough little place, to be sure; but her every dinner was a feast magnificent, Ambrosian, divine. Her raviolis ravished the palate; her spaghettis would have delectated the tongue of a Lucullus; besides, she had uncellared a plutocratic, pre-war stock. And when musical folk came—*madame* adored music—she bended every effort to render her board pluperfect—to make her cellar become a well, gushing wine artesian-wise.

Dinner was attended with difficulties. There was enough ice that afternoon to refrigerate the food. But not enough for the cocktails— Presto—send for the ice man! With whose arrival, difficulties multiplied.

Giuseppe came at half past five, spilling melody and dripping ice water. For it was a summery spring day. He had been there in the morning, but to Hulda Marie his second coming was more welcome.

Spring days are not good for the proper discharge of business duties. One could see by the listless way Giuseppe set his burden on the floor that his mind was not on the ice-box.

"Oh, Marie!" he warbled, and he took the lady by the hand.

There was a roast in the oven which should have been taken out at that precise moment—but Hulda's mind was far removed from the kitchen range.

"'Ullo, Giuseppe," she murmured in tones that would melt the iciest of ice men. But this ice man had been melted long ago.

He stopped singing. "Marie," he said, "all day to-day, I don't know watzamatta me. I breeng ice wrong place—I breeng too moch—I breeng too leetle. Eh, I say myself—watzamatta you? You craze'? In love'? Now w'at you t'eenk, Marie?"

Hulda Marie shook her head. The roast continued to roast; the ice continued to melt. The air was very warm.

"Marie," Giuseppe's voice was husky—there was a tremor in it—he had in him the qualities of an admirable actor. "Ice beesness's good. I ketcha da mon', lotsa mon'. Maybe you no like dis beesness, no lika fool roun' da kitch' all day? W'at say you queet? May*be?* And marry me som' day? Eh, w'at you say?"

Marie, with the coyness of her sex, looked demurely down at her feet—the feet that were too big.

Now, Marie knew that her feet were too big; and she knew that, though she was a personable and perhaps pulchritudinous creature, not every man would crave her flippety-floppety pedals and all. If there were the slightest question of a negative decision on her part, the number nines would have made it affirmative.

"Giuseppe!" That was all she said; not a word more. Talk was not Marie's long suit. But she had talent for nestling.

So on her *fiancé's* shoulder she nestled, snugly. He pressed her to him. He burst into song. Ordinarily Giuseppe sang with a deal of repression, keeping his voice well within the bounds of the kitchen, but tonight he was carried away by his feelings. He sang loudly, incongruously, his own curious version of Tosti:

"Bambino, adios! Adios—Bamb—"

Giuseppe had not thought of the words; but somehow the melody expressed the extravagant volcano of emotion within him. Hulda, ignorant of the lyric's significance, clung the more closely to her tenoring ice man, outdoing even the ivy in tenacity of clutch.

"Bambino, adios! Adi—"

Little pools of water collected contiguous to the ice; the ice grew smaller; the roast waxed hotter. To the drawing-room where *madame* entertained the impresario with a few of his singers, ascended simultaneously the pungent odor of burned beef and the the Carusian notes of the ice man.

Said *madame* to the impresario, as she puckered up her nose:

"Do you smell something burning?"

"No," replied the impresario rapturously, "but I hear some one singing! Eh, what a voice! *Signora,* do you keep a seraph in your cellar?"

No, *madame* did not keep a seraph in her cellar; but there was an ice man—

The lady of the house moved uneasily, torn between her obligation of courtesy to her guest and her growing concern over a burning dinner.

"Ice man!" exclaimed the impresario. "With a voice like that? But hush!"

Excitedly he waved his plump white fingers, motioning them all to silence. Even to save her rapidly dwindling pièce-de-résistance, *madame,* the hostess, did not move. She did not dare— And they listened.

When Giuseppe, below in the kitchen, finished his lyric outburst he was surprised to hear another outburst, clapping of hands and cries of "Bravo!" Slowly disentangling himself from the ardent embrace of his beloved, he took a step toward the stairway and hearkened. Still the applause volleyed. He was wondering.

"W'at you t'eenk," he queried of Hulda, "dey clap for?"

Hulda shook her head. She hadn't the slightest idea.

Giuseppe's chest swelled. "May*be* dey clap for—"

At that moment a step was heard on the top of the stair; the rustle of skirts. It was the lady of the house.

"Giusep'! O Giusep'! come up a minute, will you? There's a gentleman wants to hear you sing some more."

III.

THAT night, for the first time in his career, Iceman Spumone left a customer's house by the front door. That night, too, for the first time in her career, Hulda Marie incinerated a roast scathlessly and scoldlessly. Such is the power of music to soothe savage breasts and dissipate social barriers!

But music, on occasions, may cut the calm like a barbed irritant, may carve out of Gibraltarian rock unbridgeable social chasms. This power Hulda realized all too painfully the same momentous evening Giuseppe failed to exit *via* the kitchen.

Even more painfully she realized it next morning when she saw the change that had come over him. For he was changed; what man who has received an audience from a music-king and a tempting offer to quit cellar for spotlight would not be changed? Oh, he was lovely as ever, but—but—just a little bit patronizing. And, besides, he wore that intense air of preoccupation which one achieves by applausively listening to one's own voice.

Well, why shouldn't he wear it? Hadn't he been told that there was a gold mine in his voice? And what is more pleasant than listening to a gold mine miraculou 'y become vocal?

The offer to work which gold mine Giuseppe was not long in considering. One or two more impromptu concerts in madame's drawing-room, a vivid description of the colorful future in store for him, and Spumone was soon resolved to scrap the tongs for a career of song.

One fine morning about a week later found him delivering the last of his jumbo diamonds at Hulda's kitchen.

"Me go 'way," he explained grandly to Hulda. "Europa—studenta. They make me great tenore. Alla same Carus'. Me come back—ketch a million dolla'!"

He slapped himself pridefully on the chest, then started to clean the ice box, while the bewildered slavey leaned hopelessly on her mop.

"And aincha — never — gonna — marry me?"

There was a catch in her voice, and her eyes welled with tears.

"Watsamatta you? You want marry iceman, or you want marry great tenore?" He dumped the ice into the box. He slammed the refrigerator door. He threw down his tongs. He took her to his arms.

"Me come back—great—like Carus. Bigada wed'! Bigada reeng! Lotsa champagne! W'at you wanna marry ice man for? You wait. Nona be fool. Beside' I writa you av'ry day. Wat you want? A-a-a-ah, nona cry! You t'eenk I no feel rotten, too? Eef you know pain here," he thumped himself on the solar plexus. "You know I feel feefty time' rottener than you! A-a-a-ah, nona cry!"

At which soft injunction Hulda's tear ducts did a perfect Niagara. Words, Giuseppe felt, were inadequate to the occasion. He must burst into song—his own little version of Tosti:

"Bambino, a-dios! Bambino, adi—"

And Hulda felt herself strangely soothed by this tragic song of parting, for the melody brought back to her mind a host of tender reminiscences.

Yes, for the moment, his voice made her happy; but then—

"Bambino, adios! A-DI-I-I-OS!"

A kiss; a turn of the door knob; and he was gone. Drearily Hulda wrung out her mop into a pail (love may be love, but jobs must be held, and kitchens scrubbed); freely her tears mingled with the drably unsympathetic mop water.

Bambina, adios. In her brain his farewell song was ringing.

So, he was gone. No tangible souvenir left of him, save his ice tongs. Hulda took these to her bosom and cried some more.

IV.

THE next day a new ice man came, a weazened old fellow with a hump back and a bald head. The contrast made Hulda shudder. At the very sight of the poor old fellow she burst into tears.

For days and days, for the next few months in fact, Hulda went at her duties

with moist eyes. Her tear ducts must have been bottomless wells.

Then suddenly the bottomless wells dried up. Was it that Giuseppe was coming back to her?

No, it was that Giuseppe was a fraud! He who had promised to write every day—not a single word did he send.

Days, weeks, months, years went by, and not a word was there from him. Word *of* him—ah, yes! Spumone, the student, golden find of an enterprising impresario; Spumone, the fledgling tenor, distinguished singer of undistinguished rôles at Covent Garden; Spumone, the established craze of London, Paris and New York.

Giuseppe's name was constantly on the tongue of her mistress. To hear Hulda's employer talk of him you would think that the larynx of the ice man was responsible for more potent music than the pipes of the Hamlin rat-catcher.

As a matter of fact, Giuseppe did moderately well; ultimately landed at the top of the third-rate tenor class; got his picture into the rotogravure section once in a while; and it was not long until a phonograph company signed him at an altogether reasonable rate to do them an odd record or so.

V.

One day, a long, long time after the great tenor had said good-by to his shining tongs and dinky cart, Hulda, hustling about her kitchen—same old kitchen—paused a moment to hearken to a familiar voice above in the drawing-room.

"*Adios—adios—*"

Her heart stopped. Her bosom heaved. Could it be that he had come back—that—

But no, it was only one of those infernal gramophone records. And yet it sounded like his voice! Probably his initial record, the one her mistress had recently spoken of.

"The bum!" she said, vindictively clenching her teeth, and wringing a dish-cloth as if it were Giuseppe's neck. "The rotten bum! Oh, if ever him and me meet!"

"*Adios—*"

That didn't sound like a record.

Maybe—

"Bum!" she exclaimed. "Just let me meet him again!"

And she met him that same night.

At dinner, where she served the soup.

There he sat, regally magnificent in a boiled shirt, but grown, oh, so fat! Too fat. Beside him sat a bediamonded décolleté lady; on him the glance of the bediamonded one rested worshipfully.

"Oh, Signor Spumone," she was saying, "I always say when I hear you sing—"

Pleased as Punch, smug as a silly Sicilian billiken, Giuseppe smiled and listened attentively.

That was just as Hulda entered with the soup.

A few moments afterward Signor Spumone, chancing to glance her way, paled like a waning moon.

"The bum," thought Hulda disdainfully, "the dirty bum!" But she showed no sign of recognition. Soup must be served.

She passed back of his chair. Was it agitation—or something else that made her hand slip?

"*Madre de—*"

How musically Signor Spumone howled, whilst the soup trickled down his back.

Great excitement! Signor was scalded, his dress suit ruined; the songs in him quenched, probably, for the evening—if not forever.

"I am so sorry!" This from the hostess. Hulda, after the upset, had fled to the kitchen.

More melodramatic howlings and contortionistic writhings.

"*Donna Maledetta!*"

Then suddenly Spumone, without announcing his intentions, bolted the drawing-room like a locoed stallion.

After him sped the husband of the hostess.

Where had he gone, this scalded tenor? Upstairs, to change his coat? To the smoking room where he might freely vent the Vesuvian execrations that boiled within him? No, neither upstairs, nor to the smoking room!

Madame, the hostess, wrung her hands when her other half came back with nary a tiding of the distinguished guest's where-

abouts. Had Spumone bolted the house? Where should they catch his like again?

Madame forgot her manners, and left the company dinnerless. The etiquette book holds no provision for the emergency of a scalded tenor. Straight toward the kitchen tripped *madame*. A scolding for the scalder, and maybe the G. B.

Down the hallway to the kitchen door she sped. Nearing the latter, *madame* heard voices, both of them familiar. One of them belonged to Hulda; the other—yes, she knew that other voice.

Now the lady was neither eavesdropper nor Pauline Pry, but the door to the kitchen was two inches ajar—and—well, what would you do? So she hearkened to the voices, and saw what she could see.

"Leetla she-davil, you scalda me, eh? You scalda Giuseppe Spumone, eh?"

"Bum! Scaldya again if I get the chance. You great I's's's man! Bum!"

"Leetla Speetfira—w'y you hate me so?"

"Said y'd write ev'ry day, didn't ye? *Bum!* Now d'ye know why I hate you?"

"A-a-a-ah! W'y you so mad? I forgat when I make dat promees I no know how to writa. How can I writa when I no know how?"

"Didn'y' say y'd marry me?"

"All righta—I forgat dat promees. So far away, I meet so many people. So beesy, I forgat. Maybe eef I remamba now, bimeby you marry me?"

"Quitya kiddin'!"

"No keed—I lov' you! All other weemen too damn easy. They tal' me how wanderful I am, how beautiful I seeng. You—you—diff'rn'; you pour hot soup down my back. I lov' you—I maka good—I marry you!"

"M-m-m-m-m! How d'ye know I'd take you now? Gee, y've got fat!"

"A-a-a-a-h! All other weemen they tal' me I am beautiful. They pat me on the head. They wanna kees me. You—you—so diff'ran'—you pour hot soup down my back. You tal' me I am fat—I lov' you."

A pause; then:

"Sing me that bambino song."

"But that mean goo'-by!"

"Sing it!"

"I no wanna say goo-by!"

"Sing it!"

"Will you marry me, eef I seeng it?"

"M-m-m-m-m! Maybe! If y'll only get thin!"

To the diners upstairs, impatiently awaiting their second course, floated the voice of the tenor:

"Bambino, Adios—
Bambino, Adios."

Madame, the hostess, whose return to the dining room was simultaneously with this appealing snatch of melody, smilingly announced her regret that they might have to wait ten or fifteen minutes for the second course.

"The scullery," she said, "is having a private concert. What a curious thing the artistic temperament is! Signor Spumone is serenading the maid who scalded him!"

THE END

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HEARTLESS

SUMMER

THEY stood beneath a spreading tree,
And talked as lovers should;
And then, to seal the compact, he
Cut "Mabel" on the wood.

AUTUMN

Now back to town they both have strayed,
One day they chanced to meet;
And then and there the selfsame maid
Cut "Charlie" in the street.

A Primer for Primitives

By ERIC HOWARD

"WHAT would you do if you were cast away on a desert island?" demanded Walter Penobscot Twill of Dan Parker.

The question was purely rhetorical, but inasmuch as Mr. Twill was looking at him Dan Parker felt called upon to answer.

The question stumped Dan. He had never been cast away on a desert island, and he did not intend to be if he could help it. He had no notion of how one went about taming a desert island. Dan's specialty was bonds. Ask him anything about bonds and he could answer. But desert islands—

"I—I guess I'd just wait to be rescued," he said sensibly enough.

Twill laughed; he had a most annoying way of laughing. He was too darned supercilious, even if he was a world traveler or something. And the worst of it was that Dorothy Gresham also laughed. Dan blushed to the roots of his hair, like a schoolboy who has made a ludicrous response to his teacher's question.

"There you are," said Twill, as if he had proved the Einstein theory. "There you are! There's the average civilized city man for you. Put him up against Nature—elemental, relentless Nature—and what does he do? He waits to be rescued! Ha!"

Twill laughed again, and Dorothy gave Dan a pitying look. Then her eyes returned to Twill, admiration in her glance.

"What would you do, Mr. Twill?" she asked, with a little gasp of interest.

"I—I—" Mr. Twill cleared his throat, and his voice took on his deeper platform tones, "I should first of all look for water and food. I—"

"I thought you said it was a desert island," put in Dan.

"Even a desert island," said Mr. Twill, "may have water and certain kinds of food, if one knows where to look for them. Then I should build myself a shelter of whatever material was at hand. Then I should make fire by rubbing dry sticks together, and—"

"If it was a proper desert island," said Dan, "there wouldn't be any sticks, dry or otherwise."

Both Dorothy and Mr. Twill gave him a look that would silence an alarm clock, and Mr. Twill continued.

"Then I should prepare to catch fish, either by hook and line, if I could make the hook and line, or by spear, or by an improvised net. Fish, even raw fish, is a diet that many peoples of the world find palatable. Take, for instance, the tribes of the north Korean coast; or, coming closer to home, the semi-cannibalistic Indians of Tiburon Island, or—"

"Or cats," observed Dan, with a trace of malice, while preserving an innocent facial expression. "Cats like raw fish."

"Dan, don't be silly!" protested Dorothy.

"Well, this isn't a desert island," objected Dan. "So we should worry."

"The ultra-civilized man!" murmured Mr. Twill, as he rose from the wicker chair on the veranda.

At the moment Dan felt anything but civilized. He was positively savage, and the veneer of civilization lay very thin upon him. He felt a barbarous desire to hang one on the jaw of Mr. Twill, to decorate that gentleman's lamps, and to knock him for a goal. That was because of the look Dorothy gave him.

All that talk about desert islands! Rot! He'd like to ship Twill off to the farthest desert island, and leave him there eating raw fish.

Mr. Twill, with a word to Dorothy about a tennis match, moved off—tall, lean, distinguished, a veritable lion.

"Dan, why were you so absurd when Mr. Twill was speaking seriously?" demanded Dorothy.

"Well, this isn't a desert island, is it?" demanded Dan.

It certainly was not. It was an island right enough, completely surrounded by the Pacific Ocean, but on it grew palm trees, avocadoes, oranges, and there were gardens where tropic and subtropic plants flourished. And it was about as deserted as a subway at the rush-hour. There were people everywhere—on the hotel veranda, on the long beach, on the golf links, and farther down, in Tent Town.

The island lies some fourteen miles off the southern California coast. Twice a day a steamer from the mainland brings a cargo of vacationists. During the season, and this was the very height of the season, it is as crowded as Coney Island on a summer Sunday.

It was Saturday afternoon. The steamer had just unloaded another hundred vacationists, and was now steaming back to the mainland. To-morrow it would return with a larger human cargo. Dan was right; it could not, by any stretch of the imagination, be called a desert island.

"I wonder what you would do," murmured Dorothy, "if you were cast away on a desert island?"

"If Twill was there, too," Dan said to himself, "first of all I'd brain him."

Aloud he said: "I don't know. I guess I'd go swimming. Come on, Dorothy, let's swim!"

Dan had nothing against Mr. Twill except the age-old proposition that two's company, three's a crowd. Swimming or riding or talking with Dorothy so pleasurably filled Dan's mind that he had no room left for thoughts about desert islands, eaters of raw fish or geographical exploration.

Besides, Dan was the sort of person who takes things as they come. When he lost money on a bond deal, he whistled and said: "What do you think of that?" Once when he had been removed from beneath the wreck of his newest car, he had grinned up at his rescuer and said: "Casualties—none!"

Dan was named for a man who entered a lion's den without fear. You cannot expect such a person to be alarmed by word-pictures of a desert island.

"Come on, Dorothy, let's swim!" he pleaded.

Dan was always urging Dorothy to swim,

for they both liked the water and Dan had long cherished a romantic dream of rescuing her. He swam better than he did anything else but sell bonds, and if Dorothy would only start sinking, some time— But Dorothy was as buoyant as cork.

"All right," she nodded, when Mr. Twill was out of sight. "I'd like a swim. Oh, Dan, I'd like to float way out to sea—and be cast up on a desert island! Would you?"

"With you? You bet!"

Dorothy favored him with a Twill-like laugh. She had acquired that during the past few days, and Dan didn't like it.

"You'd be funny on a desert island!" she chortled. "You're so—so civilized!"

Dan looked at her Parisian heels, her chiffon silk stockings, her gown of Rodier crêpe, her bobbed hair—bobbed in so late a fashion that there was none like it on the veranda. He might have observed that she, too, was far from primitive; but, instead, he grinned.

"Hurry into your suit, then," he urged, "and let's imitate the seals."

While he was waiting for her—as he often did, entirely without impatience—Dan thought of Twill. Until Twill had arrived, he had had Dorothy to himself. When he had learned, a week before, that she was coming to the island for her vacation, he had begged his partner, who was about to leave town, to let him go instead.

"I've got to go, Bill!" he had protested. Dorothy favored him with a Twill-like place is alive with sheiks. I've got to go—it's my only chance!"

And Bill, his partner, having recently become engaged, could sympathize with him. He deferred his own out-of-town trip and packed Dan off with hearty good wishes.

Dan, making the most of opportunity, had progressed nicely. Dorothy was fond of him, and when the time seemed most propitious Dan was going to ask her the great question. He was only putting it off until the psychological or dramatic moment. If he could save her life, or something like that—

Then came Mr. Walter Penobscot Twill, cloaked in romance, as vocal as a loud speaker, looking like an illustration from the *National Geographic,* author of "What to Do On a Desert Island." As Dan's propitious moment receded into a black future, his thoughts of Mr. Twill grew increasingly homicidal.

The arrival of Dorothy drove the gloom from his face, and, hand in hand, as of yore, they raced through the sprawling beach-bathers to the surf. In they plunged and swam far out beyond the breakers.

"This is almost as good as a desert island," observed Dan, as they floated easily on the calm waters of the Pacific. And he thought: "Now if she'd sink and I could save her!"

Dorothy, in that respect, was most unobliging. But she did let Dan hold her hand, and now and then she smiled as if she had never seen Mr. Twill. Dan grew hopeful, but he wished for a still more propitious time. Even an expert swimmer can't manage a well-rounded, complete proposal in deep water.

They swam and floated for a long time—until the sun began to descend over the crest of the island. As the golden ball of fire rested on the hilltop, it seemed suddenly brighter and more fiery than it had ever been before.

"Dan!" cried Dorothy. "Look!"

She pointed dramatically to the hotel, just below the crest of the hill. Although the sun was above it, the hotel seemed bathed in fire. As a matter of fact, it was. It was burning. A great cloud of black smoke rose; out of it shot flames, leaping to the sky. Then the smoke cleared for a moment, and they saw that the hotel building was completely encircled by fire.

"My clothes!" cried Dorothy.

"Some fire!" observed Dan. "Complete and total loss. And the hotel full up, and all the tents full, and all these people homeless! Not only homeless, but most of 'em clotheless! Well, it lets us out of dressing for dinner, anyway."

"Dan, what are you laughing at?" demanded Dorothy. Were there tears, or was it sea water, in her eyes?

"I was just thinking," explained Dan, "that you and Twill are getting your wish! It may not be a desert island, exactly, but with the hotel burned, and the place crowded, a lot of us aren't going to have

any beds or any shelter or any clothes—and maybe not any food to-night. The boat can't get back until midnight, if it comes then, and it can't safely carry more than a hundred. Most of us will spend a night or two in the open. And Twill," he added, "can write a new book called 'One Night on a Desert Isle.'"

Yes, there were tears in Dorothy's eyes. She shook her head fiercely, to keep from weeping about that Rodier crêpe, and swam shoreward. Dan followed. The hotel was burning beautifully, he observed, and it was lucky it happened in the daytime instead of at night. Dan could see good luck in almost anything.

II.

"My jools!" cried a motion picture actress, with visions of front-page publicity. "They're gone! My gowns! Everything!"

"My checkbook's burned!" protested an elderly man in golf knickers. "Where's one to get money?"

They stood about on the beach, in little groups, in bathing suits, golf and tennis clothes, riding habits. Above them the ruins of the hotel smoldered darkly.

Little had been saved. Most of the guests were away at the time of the fire; those who were there had been too excited to do anything but run. For it was a most sudden and overwhelming blaze. The explanation that filtered through the crowd was that there had been an explosion in the clothes-cleaning plant. A tank of gasoline had exploded with such violence that the hotel was afire before the firefighters could get out their hose and chemical extinguishers.

It was as unexpected as it was catastrophic, and the guests of the hotel stood, shocked and helpless, homeless and bedless, staring at the ruins.

The people of Tent Town, the cheaper quarters down the beach, were better off, for the fire had not touched them. But Tent Town was crowded. There were no more tents to be put up; there was no shelter for those who had been burned out.

Representatives of the hotel company flitted through the crowd, picking out the older or more hysterical guests. These they arranged to house in tents that would be given up by adventurous youths who didn't mind sleeping out of doors.

The worst of it was that a fog was thickening over the island. Presently it would descend upon them. After a warm day, there is nothing chillier than a Pacific fog. And to sleep in a bathing suit, without blankets, out of doors on such a night—well, it was to avoid just such discomforts that civilization came into being.

Dorothy Gresham was weeping—not because of the fog, or the lack of blankets, or the discomforts to be anticipated, but because she had lost her choicest frocks. That was good and sufficient reason for weeping, as every woman knows; but Dan couldn't understand it.

"Don't cry, Dorothy!" he begged her. "You just wait somewhere where I can find you, and I'll see that you're taken care of! If you wait right here, until I come back, I'll have a place fixed up for you—dinner, bed, and everything. Now don't cry!"

"I will cry! I lost all my clothes!"

"I'll get you some clothes, too," he offered grandly. "They may not be as nice as yours, but they'll be clothes!"

"Where—?"

"Never mind. You wait here until I come back. Will you?"

"Y-y-yes," wept Dorothy. "Oh, there's Mr. Twill! He—"

"Sure, wait with him, right here!" advised Dan, as he hurried off.

"I've looked everywhere for you," Twill told her. "Isn't it terrible? I've lost my manuscripts, my clothes—everything! But I've been worse off many a time. Shall we make the best of it?"

"Y-y-es," said Dorothy. She could rely on Mr. Twill; he would know what to do; hadn't he written a book about desert islands?

"Good!" said Twill. "It will be sport, really! We'll build a fire with that driftwood over there, and I'll make you a shelter out of driftwood and seaweed, like the one I made when I found myself alone on Loa-Toa. And if we can't get food somewhere, we'll dig clams, as I did on Loa-Toa, and have a clambake over our fire!"

"That will be nice," agreed Dorothy in an Alice-in-Wonderland tone. And she gave Mr. Twill an admiring glance.

Dan hadn't thought of doing such things. Dan didn't know how to do them. He was too civilized. If one was to be on a desert island at all, it was best to be with a man like Mr. Twill.

Dan had gone away looking for clothes and food and shelter. Just like a civilized, city man! But Mr. Twill was going to build her a shelter, was going to dig clams for food. And if she wanted him to, he could probably make her a whole dress out of seaweed or something.

Dorothy forgot her Rodier crêpe, and likewise her promise to wait for Dan, and followed the man who battled elemental, relentless Nature down the beach.

III.

Dan Parker ran towards Tent Town. There was confusion everywhere, except in Dan's mind. He knew exactly what he wanted to do, but he wasn't so sure that he could do it.

"Clothes first," he murmured, in his civilized fashion. "I've got to get Dorothy a complete outfit, if I have to steal it. Then blankets, heaps of blankets. It's going to be a cold night. And grub—gosh, I'm getting hungry. A big thick steak, a couple of cans of something, and maybe a pie. Yes, and coffee. Must have coffee, even if we can't manage cream. Well, why not get cream too? And Dorothy uses sugar, doesn't she? All right—that's the list!"

At the edge of Tent Town he paused. The cafeteria that fed the tent-tenants was crowded, and a long line of refugees, most of them in bathing suits, stood outside, shiveringly awaiting their turn.

"Huh!" observed Dan. "That's no good! If we joined that line-up we wouldn't be fed for two hours."

In his simple, civilized, hungry way, Dan demanded prompt service. But clothes for Dorothy—they came first. He walked down one of the narrow, electric-lighted lanes of Tent Town. Here and there little groups were gathered, discussing the fire.

"There's one old guy," he heard some one say, "worth a million or more begging for a place to sleep! And the swells have to stand in line, same as we do, waiting for their grub!"

Dan paid no heed to this communism, but looked eagerly about.

"There she is!" he said, at last. "Just Dorothy's size, I'll bet! And she dresses well. Blessed are the chic!"

He advanced upon the young woman who had caught his eye. She was in front of the tent in which she lived. He stood before her, in a still damp bathing suit, and bestowed upon her the smile that sold bonds.

"You can help me out of a great difficulty," he told her. "I'm going to ask you to help me because you have a kind face and because you wear such beautiful clothes."

He paused and watched the girl's lips curve into a smile. Just like selling bonds, he reflected. He leaned forward and his tone became confidential. He observed that she wore a diamond engagement ring.

"My girl lost all her clothes in the fire," he explained. "She's just your size—looks like you, too, awfully pretty. And she's crying about her clothes. And there's another man—a fellow that thinks he knows everything. I've got to take care of her. I've got to show her I can get her clothes and bedding and food before he does. Will you help me?" he pleaded. "Just a dress like that one, and the things that go with it, you know—stockings and everything. And shoes—" he looked down at her feet—"yes, she can wear your shoes; her feet are tiny too."

Dan gazed earnestly into her eyes.

"You've a kind face," he murmured. "And say, I'll do something for you some time. My name's Parker—Thomas and Parker, Merchants' Exchange Building."

"Why, I work in that building!" said the girl.

Dan clasped her hands. "Good!" he cried. "That makes us friends, doesn't it? And you're engaged—you know how it is!"

The girl darted into her tent. Dan grinned.

"Here they are," she said, as she returned. "I can spare these all right. And,

Mr. Parker, I can get you some blankets. My brother has the next tent, and mother and dad are other there. We can spare one from each tent."

Depositing the clothing in Dan's arms she hastened after blankets.

"You're an angel," Dan murmured. And to himself: "I knew she had a kind face!"

With a bow as low as his burden would permit, Dan thanked her.

"I'll make it right with you," he promised, "when he get back to town. You're noble, absolutely noble!"

"Don't mention it, Mr. Parker. And—good luck!"

Dan hastened back to the cafeteria, skirted the line that waited for food, and made for the rear of the building. He came to the door of the kitchen, and entered without knocking.

The chef and all his assistants were busily engaged, rushing here and there, shouting orders at one another, preparing food for the hungry mob outside. Dan deposited the blankets and clothing on a table and walked across the long room.

There was a beautiful array of carved beef over there. Dan studied it carefully, chose a steak that was sufficiently large and thick for a small army, and wrapped it in a piece of heavy paper. Then he walked to the shelves lined with tinned food, where he selected several cans of vegetables and one of particularly choice peaches. He looked about and discovered loaves of fresh bread. He took two. The pies came next, and he chose the largest and most tempting one that he saw.

"Coffee, sugar, cream and butter," he said to himself, like a suburbanite with a market basket.

He found the coffee easily, and the sugar was next to it. The whereabouts of the cream and butter puzzled him, and he almost collided with a knife-bearing cook in his quest.

"Hey, whatcha doin'?" demanded the cook.

Dan patted him on his white-coated shoulder and whispered confidingly: "Getting some grub for a lady. She's sick and can't stand in line out there. It'll save you the trouble of cooking, too. Say, where's the cream and butter?"

"Ice-box," murmured the cook, with a wave of his knife, as he rushed to the massacre of a leg of lamb.

"The ice-box, of course!" said Dan.

Then, with the food carried in one blanket over his shoulder, balancing the bottle of cream and the pie in one hand, he rushed out and up the beach.

IV.

MR. TWILL'S fire was not a conflagration. The driftwood, he explained, was a trifle damp. And the wind was most variable, which made the matter of a good draft a problem. Now on Loa-Toa the driftwood had been dry, and the wind had been much more satisfactory. Mr. Twill, as even Dorothy could see, was beginning to be annoyed.

He did succeed, however, in getting the fire started, by dint of prodigious blowing. It flamed for a moment, and then relapsed into dull sparks.

"Now I'll build you a shelter," he offered grandly. "But you must blow the fire if it threatens to go out."

"Y-y-yes," agreed Dorothy.

She didn't want a shelter, just now, so much as she wanted a fire and something to eat. It was cold, and she shivered. Besides, she began to doubt whether a shelter composed of damp driftwood and dank seaweed, probably incrusted with nasty little bugs, would be much of a shelter. This wasn't Loa-Toa, and there was no use pretending it was.

Dorothy was hungry. She wished Mr. Twill would get at his promised clam-digging. She wasn't overly fond of clams, but by this time she felt that she could eat anything. There was no use looking for other food. The people who had gone to the cafeteria had returned to report the long line. It would be an hour or more before a tenth of them could be fed.

Dorothy felt utterly helpless, and the romance faded out of her mind. If only her father and mother had come with her. But her father hadn't been able to get away, and her mother had had some club business

to attend to. They had promised to come over Sunday and to spend next week with her. But now, probably, they wouldn't be allowed to come. And she couldn't get away, couldn't get home—for days, maybe.

Mr. Twill energetically set up the framework of Dorothy's shelter. She, meanwhile, forgot to blow on the fire, and even the sparks faded to charred blackness.

"Here, here!" said Mr. Twill. "This won't do! You've let the fire go out."

Was there a shade of petulance in his voice! There was. Dorothy resented it. Did he think she was a squaw?

"Your darned old fire was no good!" she said, and her eyes smarted saltily. "I'm hungry—why don't you dig some clams? Let that old tepee go!"

Mr. Twill shook his head in silent reproof. That wasn't the spirit that makes the best of things; that wasn't the way to act on a desert island. Nevertheless he abandoned his architectural labors and, with a forked piece of driftwood, set about digging for the elusive clam.

He had captured two very small ones when Dan, who had set forth half an hour before on his marauding expedition, returned to find Dorothy gone.

"Dorothy!" he shouted. "Dorothy!"

Dorothy leaped up, with a smile, and answered: "Here I am!" Mr. Twill left off his labors, and Dan approached, on the run. He carried no burden of clothing and food now; he had already disposed of them where they would do the most good.

"Why didn't you wait for me?" he demanded.

Was there a shade of petulance in his voice? There was, but Dorothy did not resent it.

"I—I came with Mr. Twill," she explained. "He's digging clams for our dinner!"

"Clams!" snorted Dan, with a glance at the flameless fire. "Why, child, you're shivering! You come with me."

"See here!" interjected Mr. Twill. "We'll have a jolly clam-bake and a roaring fire in no time at all! And I've started a shelter for Miss Gresham!" He pointed to four wabbly driftwood timbers as if they were the Parthenon. "You stay here, Miss Gresham, and you'll be comfortable. I know what to do. I've been worse off many a time—shipwrecked and—"

"Cast up on a desert island," finished Dan. "Come on, Dorothy, before you take pneumonia!"

"But Dan—" Dorothy hesitated. After all, clams were better than nothing. And Mr. Twill might make the fire burn; and the seaweed shelter might be all right.

Dan also was hungry, too hungry to waste any time on words. Therefore, in his simple civilized way, he lifted Dorothy in his arms and made off with her.

"See here!" cried Mr. Twill. "See here!"

"Where are you taking me?" demanded Dorothy, meekly. Dan's arms were surprisingly strong and warm; and, somehow, she didn't mind being carried in this primitive fashion.

"To a house, of course," said Dan. "Do you think I'm going to let you spend the night on the beach? Well, I should say not!"

"A house?" echoed Dorothy. "Where? There isn't any house! And the tents are all full, and—"

"Never mind," said Dan. "I've got a house, all right. And everything else you need. And after we've had dinner I'll go down and try to get a message to your mother. She'll be worried, if she's heard about the fire."

"But what house?" asked Dorothy, beginning to fear that Dan was a little mad.

"It's not much of a house," said Dan. "Just a fisherman's hut. I found it one day when you were riding with Walter Penobscot. Over in a little cove. Not far away. It's not occupied, but there's a bed in it and a stove, and you'll be comfortable."

He puffed up the hill. Dorothy struggled out of his arms, took his hand and walked along beside him. They dropped down from the brow of the hill, and Dan led the way to the dark little hut.

He lifted Dorothy over the sill, struck a match from a box on the table, and lighted an oil lamp.

"Now," he said, pointing to the door of another room, "you go in there and put these on, while I cook this steak." He

dropped into her hands a bundle of dainty feminine garments, and turned to light the oil stove in the corner.

Dorothy gazed at him in awe—the same expression that she had lately bent upon Walter Penobscot Twill, and obediently went into the second room.

When she returned it was to the odor of sizzling steak and coffee—the most delicious of odors! And on the table there was a bottle of cream, a square of butter, fresh bread, and—of all things—a pie!

"Dan, wherever—"

Dan turned. "They fit, don't they?" he asked. "I thought they would. Gee, that's a nice dress—you look—"

The coffee pot issued a warning, and he turned in time to save the contents.

"If my friend Bacigalupi—he's the fisherman that owns this house—comes back we'll have to explain our invasion. I busted his lock, but he won't mind. And he's usually aboard his boat at night."

"Wherever did you get—these—and that—and that?" insisted Dorothy.

"It's easy when you know how," observed Dan. "I've been worse off many a time. Now when I was cast up on Loa-Toa, or was it Toa-Loa? Anyway, desert islands—"

"Dan!" protested Dorothy, and there were tears in her eyes.

The propitious moment, thought Dan. At last it had come! And, with no thought of the hissing coffee or the sizzling steak, he caught her in his arms and kissed away her tears.

"Dear little beachcomber!" he said. "When I send that message to your mother I'm going to tell her that we're engaged!"

"Mother likes you, Dan," observed Dorothy. "She said you were so resourceful. I—I wouldn't mind being on a desert island with you. I'll bet you'd catch a shark and roast him for dinner! But, Dan, didn't you get any clothes for yourself? You'll catch cold!"

Dan laughed—a twill-like laugh.

"Not me! I'm primitive! I battle nature—elemental, relentless nature—"

A kiss stopped him, and they fell upon the steak—such is the cruelty of youth—with never a thought for Walter Penobscot Twill and his mess of clams.

THE END

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THE SEAMANNIKIN

WHEN the wild west wind is singing
And the billows leap with glee,
Where's a sweeter joy than winging
Like a swallow o'er the sea?
Be your vessel sloop or liner,
Schooner, sampan, what is finer
Than the spell of gale and surges rushing free?

Up aloft the white sails battle,
Gleaming; tall ships lean to lee;
Salt spray spatters; riggings rattle
With old ocean's ecstasy.
What, I ask you, could be grander?
Nothing—but the club veranda,
With cigars and chairs and lemonade, for me!

Harold Willard Gleason.

Merciful Plunder

By WILLIAM HOPE HODGSON

CAPTAIN MELLOR, trading along the Adriatic coast, had put in at one of those small seaports which found themselves involved in the wars so common in the Balkans. He had stayed the night ashore with a business acquaintance whose veranda, under its cane mat sun roof, commanded a magnificent view over the red slates of the village beyond which he could see his own ship as she lay at anchor, among a dozen others, in the bay.

From the mountains to his left there came every now and again the monstrous far-off grunt of a big gun. For days a prolonged fight had been waging. At times the far-off grunting would merge into a ponderous grumbling of sound, then, the continuous mutter dying away, there came the vast *hrrump, hrrump* of the rifles in the unseen fort that lay round on the eastern shoulders of the hills which sloped away into the sea in the curve of the coast.

Each time the fort fired Captain Mellor felt the iron-framed chair under him tingle, and the windows behind him jarred and thrummed to the huge, ugly sound. Even the silver and green leaves of the olive trees all about the châlet seemed to quiver oddly with the great throb of the vibrated air.

Suddenly he sat up in his chair, his cup of coffee halfway to his lips. Through the still air of the eastern morning came the cries of a lad in agony.

He sickened as he heard with incredible clearness the awful sound. He had refused to go down into the village to see the butchery which the war authorities had dignified with the name of execution, though his friend, a Frenchman, had joined the onlookers at the scene. But he knew by the cries that the punishment was being carried out for twenty of the band of forty youths of the enemy who had been caught the day before fighting out of uniform—a youthful band of " death or glory " irregulars.

And so, an hour later, sitting on the quiet balcony amid the silent olives, the drowse and rest of the hushed morning about him, Captain Mellor listened to his host's account of the punishment.

The Frenchman shook with emotion as he described it. He declaimed against it all, though the youths had been taken fighting, out of uniform, upon their own initiative, and firing from ambush against the natives of the place where he lived and did business.

" And to-morrow," he ended, " the osser twenty will be executed, they say."

" No, they won't!" cried Captain Mellor. He jumped up from his chair, mopped his forehead with his red cotton handkerchief, and sat down again.

The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders. He continued his tale of horror and emotion till at last the captain interrupted him.

" If you don't like that sort of thing you should have kept away," he told him. " I don't like it, so I didn't go. After all, I expect the boys got what was coming to them."

" But, *monsieur—Sapristi!* It is terrible so to speak."

His friend's callousness shocked him, and he burst out afresh in horror; but Captain Mellor refused to show overmuch sympathy. Yet without seeming to be interested he managed to get a certain amount of very definite information from the excited Frenchman.

He discovered, for instance, where the second batch of prisoners was locked up. Also how they were guarded. And one or two other details which joined on, as one might say.

" Well," he said at last, " let's finish our business. I am sailing some time to-night."

Later that day the two men went down into the little town and took a walk round the palm-lined public square, where stood the low scaffold in readiness of the next morning.

With the terrible insouciance of the East —for even the Near East is touched with this quality of insensitiveness to the merciful fitness of things—the scaffold was neither more nor less than one of the town's fête platforms, used at half a dozen big festivals in the year.

When Captain Mellor saw it, the front was draped with the black funeral trappings which the townspeople hang round their doors before a funeral. And crowded on the platform were scores of the natives of all ages, standing with strangely morbid pleasure upon the very spot where those boys had met their deaths a few hours previously.

" Come on," said the captain to his friend, " this sickens me."

He dragged the Frenchman down to the water front, where stood the municipal hall. Farther along the quay side was a tall building, outside of which stood a guard, leaning on his rifle.

" Up there, captain," said the Frenchman, " up there where you see the barred window. Zat is the room at the utmost top!"

" Sorry for 'em," replied the captain callously. " But I guess they'll be all right this time to-morrow!"

" Ah!" exclaimed his friend. " You are of all the most hard man I ever speak to."

Yet when Captain Mellor stepped into his boat and was pulled off to his ship that night, he had achieved a knowledge of local geography that would have amazed his friend. He had spurred the little Frenchman by his callous remarks to enlarge upon every detail concerning the twenty prisoners who were to die in the morning. The Frenchman had been incurably voluble and profuse with explanations, intent only to waken some pity in this Englishman.

And all the time Captain Mellor had shrugged his great shoulders and answered inhumanly. But always he had used his eyes, even while he used his ears to take in all the information that his friend insisted on deluging him with.

It was the Frenchman who had suggested they should go to inspect the prisoners. He knew the officer in charge, and he was sure of getting permission. The captain showed no enthusiasm, but submitted to be dragged to the prison. Here after a brief talk, his friend, accompanied by his officer acquaintance and one of the guards, invited him to come and see " the birds."

Never would the captain forget what he saw! The room was just under the roof, and the windows shut fast. There was dirty straw all over the floor, and the prisoners, most of them. were lying silently about.

Not one of them looked up or showed any sign of interest. They were all of them under eighteen, and at least half of them were boys of fourteen and fifteen. Some were wounded and roughly bandaged, and all of them showed marks of ill treatment.

"They'll be gone this time to-morrow," said the sergeant in patois, laughing and stubbing out the lighted end of his cigarette stump against the bare leg of one of the prostrate youths. "Pouf, they are pigs! Come on out," he added as he led the way downstairs again.

Thus it was that Captain Mellor, as he stepped into his boat that evening, had by the use of ears and eyes and some aid of good fortune, the following knowledge stowed in his big head:

He knew that the twenty boys were locked in the topmost room of that four-storied house which was owned by the mayor of the town. The house was built quite by itself on the edge of the road, with, at the back of it, the sheer, blasted rock face of the cliff that, further to the north, ran out into a long dwindling point of black rock. This cliff stood up within fifteen feet of the rear of the house and rose at least a hundred feet above it.

With regard to the house, the windows of the top room were all barred, and the roof was, like all other houses in the place, of red tiles wired down to the rafters underneath.

The top floor was just one big room, entered by a door at the head of the long flight of stairs. The door was covered with sheet iron on the inside, and the same kind of sheet iron had been nailed over the rafters so as to hide the backs of the naked tiles and prevent them from being removed by any prisoner.

The floor immediately below the prison room was also without partition, and was in use as a temporary guard room; three soldiers being stationed there while the fourth stood on guard at the main entrance to the house. The lower floors were used as temporary offices and headquarters by the military authorities.

The guard at the main entrance was relieved every two hours, and the prisoners were fed morning and evening, and inspected day and night every time the guard was relieved.

From this mass of information which Captain Mellor had accumulated some idea may be had of the good use he had made of his friend's eternal volubility, and of his brief visit to the prison.

When he got aboard he sent word to the chief engineer that he wanted him.

"Is it away we are, George?" asked the chief as he entered the captain's cabin. "It's not sorry I am to be goin'—the murderin' brutes! Did ye see the doin's this mornin'?"

Captain Mellor shook his head.

"Were you there, Mac?" he asked.

"Aye, I was that!" replied the chief engineer. "It was disgusting. Plain beheadin' I've seen, an' plain hangin'; but yon was just brute's work. I tell ye I had me work cut out to keep me hands in me pockets—I had that!"

"Mac," said the captain, "there's twenty more of those boys. They're going to be treated in the same way tomorrow morning. Mac, are you game to stop it?"

"You can't stop it, George; not without you've a whole bonnie regiment like the Gordons to clean them devils out an' set the dirty place on fire!" answered the chief.

"Mac," said Captain Mellor, "I've seen the prisoners. I've been up in that dirty, stinking room with them. Yon Frenchman ashore knows the officer in charge, and they took me up. I went so that I could see how the coast lies; and all the time I told the little Frenchman and the officer that I reckoned such scum was better off the earth. They'll never suspect me if I happen to let loose the whole bunch, Mac.

"I pretended I wasn't much interested; but I saw everything there was to see. It's the end house to the north, and the cliff's no more than fifteen feet from the back of the house. But the windows are all barred. A good length of two and a half manila, a block, a short spar and a file, and a couple of men to give me a hand, and I'll engage to be at sea this time to-morrow with all that bunch of youngsters. I'll land them down the coast in their own part of the world, and I'll cover the ship's name up. Are you game, Mac?"

"An' what 'll happen if we're caught, George?" asked the chief. "I'm thinkin' they'll be no very merciful!"

"Shoot us on sight, I s'pose," replied his captain. "Are you game to try it?"

"A file 'll no do for them bars, George," said the chief. "It's a good thing, man, you've the sense to ask an engineer to come wi' ye. I'll bring a hack saw an' some oil; an' I'm no thinkin' it's the bars as will trouble us. I'll speak to Alec. He was wi' me ashore along wi' the mate this mornin' an' he'll be eager to bear a hand."

"What did the mate say about the thing, Mac?" asked Captain Mellor.

"Not much! But ye know what Mr. Grey is. He just hooked his fist into my arm an' said he thanked God he was English; which I said nothing to, for I'd sooner be English myself than one of that lot ashore! You ask him. I'm betting he's spoiling to do something useful, George."

"And you'll get your crowd below, Mac, will you, and have steam up ready?" said Captain Mellor. "I'll tell the second to heave her short so we can break the hook out and away the moment we get back."

"Aye," said the chief engineer grimly as he turned to leave the cabin. "The moment we get back, George. Maybe they'll have to wait eternity for that same moment, I'm thinkin'!"

II.

FOUR hours later when the night had come down deep and silent upon the Adriatic, Captain Mellor brought his boat near in to the end of the low point of rock where it sloped down and disappeared under the warm, still water.

"Shove the grapple over quiet," he said. "Sound carries a mighty long way on a night like this. Pay out now. Right. Make her fast there. She'll ride just clear of the rocks. Mac, jump ashore with Alec, and one of you hold the painter while I pass you out the gear."

Ten minutes later the four men were climbing the long slope of the point, the captain and the mate carrying a thirty-foot spar, and the two engineers a coil of two and a half inch manila, a pulley block and a few of the tools of their profession. Behind them in the darkness the double-bowed boat was moored with her stern toward the grapple, and her bows toward the end of the low point, so that in a hurried retreat they would be able to haul her close in with the painter in a moment and jump aboard.

Half an hour's walk brought them to the top of the cliff at the back of the prison.

"Quietly now," muttered the captain. "Keep away from the edge while I go and have a look round."

He lowered his end of the spar gently to the ground and went forward cautiously.

"Further along," he told them when he came back.

When they reached the edge of the cliff, creeping, they found they were directly above the prison house, and Captain Mellor and the mate got to work at once to rig the spar out over the cliff.

Mac and Alec had been gone but a few minutes in their search for some large stones to hold down the heel of the spar when a woman's scream was heard some sixty or seventy feet away.

"Hark, man! What's that?" asked the captain.

A few moments and the second engineer came up breathless.

"For all sakes come, captain," he gasped. "The chief's got a woman back there in the bushes and he can't quiet her. He doesn't understand a bit what she's talking."

Quickly the three men ran through the bushes to where the woman was hysterically shouting at the engineer.

"What is it? Who are you?" asked Captain Mellor in the patois common in the north of the island of Euboe.

The woman gave a cry and, whirling round on him in the darkness, sank to her knees.

"Aie," she called out. "They killed my son this morning. My youngest they kill to-morrow—"

"Whist ye! Whist ye now," muttered the chief. "Ye'll have us all hanged."

The woman caught the captain round the knees and poured out mad entreaties. He loosed her arms and, taking her by the shoulders, shook her with a quiet violence that seemed to bring her suddenly to her senses, for she became instantly silent.

Then the captain explained to her why they were there. He showed her how she was robbing her boy of his one chance of life by making any sort of outcry up there on the top of that lonely cliff on a quiet night when sound would travel far.

"I am no more than a she-dog that you may beat or strangle if I make one sound," was what she replied.

"They killed her eldest boy this morning," explained the captain to the others. "To-morrow the youngest one is to die."

"God help her!" said Mac. "Well, maybe we'll save the other for her."

"Aye," answered the captain. "We'll save the other boy for her, God willing. Now get going, all of us. Mr. Grey, back to the spar!"

He turned and spoke gently to the woman, telling her to hunt round for pieces of rock and bring them to the cliff edge. The two engineers cast about them again for bowlders while Captain Mellor followed the first mate to where the spar lay.

Fifteen minutes later it was rigged out some fourteen feet over the side of the cliff. The two-inch manila rope had been rove through the sheave in the outer end, and the inner end of the long spar had been covered with a mass of heavy pieces of rock so as to withstand the weight of a man upon the tackle at the outer end.

It was Captain Mellor who went down first, for he had to get into communication with the boys to prevent any of them making an outcry in their surprise at seeing some one at work on the bars of their prison.

He was lowered slowly down and got his feet on to the sill of the window, then, while he gripped a bar with one hand he reached between with the other, and began very gently to knock steadily on the glass.

Fear had made the boys abnormally sharp-witted. In a moment the panes vibrated slightly as if the catch were being slid up. Then slowly and cautiously the window was pulled open.

"S-sh!" whispered the captain, beginning to explain matters. Before he had finished every lad in the room had crowded round the window.

"Now, not a sound," he warned them. "When does the guard come round?"

The guard, they told him, had just been round, and telling them to go back and lie upon the floor as if asleep, he gave the signal to be hauled up again.

"All serene, Mac," he told the chief. "You can lower me down now, and I'll stand on the sill and send the bowline up for you. You come along down and cut those bars out. Now, then, down with me, smart."

Five seconds later Mac was beside him with his feet thrust in between the bars on the sill, and his weight taken by the bowline in which he sat so as to be able to use both hands at his work.

"Now, George," he said, "you stand by me with the oil can an' I'll have two o' these bars out inside o' fifteen minutes. I know this dirty Spanish iron! It's like bad butter with the sunstroke. Ye could almost cut it with the back of your finger!"

Yet in spite of the chief's contempt for what he termed "Spanish" iron, the bars proved reasonably healthy metal, though the tempered hack saw ate into them with marvelous ease.

But there was one thing which could not be achieved, and that was silence. The "bite" of the small saw seemed to fill the room and to go echoing with a minute, diabolical shrillness down the "well" formed by the back of the house and the side of the cliff.

Oil proved ineffectual to bring silence, and so did soap, a cake of which the chief had brought in the hope of making the saw work quietly. Yet the bars must be cut, and as speedily as possible, and so the risk of being heard must be taken along with all the other mad risks they were running.

A three-foot length of the first bar had been cut clean away and the chief had started on the second when the thing Captain Mellor had feared happened. There was a sudden sound of feet on the stairs leading up to the prison, and the lad nearest the window whispered shrilly:

"They come. They come."

Mac had heard the sound at the same moment. He stopped his saw and swung away silently to the same side of the window as Captain Mellor.

The steps came steadily up the stairs,

and light showed all round the edges of the door.

"Quick!" cried the captain in patois to the youth at the window. "Take this!"

He thrust the cut-out portion of the bar at him. "Shut the window quick, and lie down. Pretend to sleep. If he sees anything you must hit him with the iron. If you fail *you* die."

He swung away from the window as the lad pushed it shut, and caught the bowline in which Mac sat. He heard the key turn in the lock as the lad closed the window. A moment of intense suspense, then a burst of light and the noise of a door as it crashed open against the right-hand wall.

The two men outside heard some one enter the room and shuffle about among the boys. There came dull thuds and cries. The captain thrust his body entirely out of line with the window, and his weight was supported partly by the bowline and partly by the toe of his right boot, which he kept on the extreme corner of the ledge.

Leaning to the right somewhat he saw, by looking into the room, the cause of the sounds. The guard, with drawn sword in one hand and a lantern in the other, was kicking the youths lustily as he walked round among them.

"What devil's work are you up to now?" he growled. "I heard your noise. To-morrow you'll have no chance of speaking. Better talk now, you pigs!"

But as he got no reply, only groans, as he stepped brutally on the bodies lying about the floor, he appeared satisfied there was no cause for alarm, and again telling them that to-morrow would rid him of them forever, he concluded his inspection and made for the door.

At this moment a cruel thing happened. A sudden gust of wind blowing round the lofty house, pushed one of the French windows open. The lamp in the guard's hand flickered, and he whirled round.

With a suspicious cry he crossed the room to the window, held up his lamp and discovered the sawed iron bar.

"Arre!" he exclaimed, whirling round and flashing his lamp upon the floor where lay the lad who had stood at the window. Once, twice, three times he kicked him, then the lad jumped at him, the solid iron bar between his hands.

Before the bayonet could be raised the heavy bar came down and the guard with it. He lay there very quiet on the floor.

"Shut the door and lock it, one of you," commanded Captain Mellor through the bars. "Put out the lamp, and make no noise." Then to the chief he said: "Get savage with that bar, Mac. We've got to be out of this inside ten minutes."

Without a word the chief swung back into place and fitted the blade of his hack saw into the nick he had already been sawing. Then grimly disregarding all precautions he drove the little tempered saw back and forth in one long skirr of sound which seemed to set the whole "well" singing with the shrill echo.

"Through!" he cried, and, reaching up for a second cut, the shirr of sound again filled the black depth below them, echoing to right and left among the absolute silence of the cliff face.

Suddenly there was a sharp snap. Mac swore softly under his breath and fumbled in his pocket for a spare blade.

"Swing to the side, Mac," cried Captain Mellor, sensing what had happened. "I'm going to give a heave on the bar."

"It's scarce half through, George. Ye couldna budge it, strong as ye are," replied the chief.

Nevertheless, he swung away a foot, for Captain Mellor had a reputation for strength which he could never hope to justify to a better end.

As the captain stooped, bending his great knees and gripping the lower end of the bar with his right hand, a voice from somewhere below in the building called out:

"Peldra! Peldra! Peldra!"

"They're shouting for yon man the lad clouted!" muttered Mac. "I'm thinkin' we're done this trup, George. I canna see to fix this blade an' me hands all on the go wi' excitement! Whist, they're comin'!"

Steps were on the stairs—heavy steps running up. Inside the dark room hopeless fear took the lads as they huddled together. The captain put all on the hazard of his strength. He bent his knees again, gripped the bar with one enormous hand

and the bar went upward with a curious dull bang.

Diving into the room, the bar still in his hand, Captain Mellor sprang for the door. A hand was fumbling for the knob. In that instant the captain turned the key, letting the lock come back quietly.

The handle shook, and a voice called out twice: "Peldra, Peldra!" And another voice from below called out loud and clear:

"Open the door, Marx; open the door!"

It was the voice of the sergeant who had stubbed out his cigarette on the leg of one of the youths that morning.

"It's locked, sergeant," replied the half drunken guard outside the door. Then he called out a contradiction as the door gave way before his push.

"Peldra!" he said, drunkenly, stumbling into the room. "Where's the lamp?"

From his place behind the door the captain heard the sergeant coming up at a run. In the threshold the man butted heavily into the guard, sending him spinning. A moment later the sergeant struck a match and, holding it high above his head, stepped into the room, his saber ready in his right hand.

"Peldra!" he called sharply. "Where are you?"

Then, as if sensing danger, he whirled round just as Captain Mellor sprang from behind the door. As the man cut at him Captain Mellor caught the blow on the iron bar he held. Striking with his weapon sidewise he knocked the saber out of the sergeant's hand, and, dropping the bar, he used his fists.

The match had gone out, but he could see the man dimly outlined against the window. As he shouted an alarm, the captain's right fist caught his jaw violently and he fell with a thud to the floor.

"Mac," called the captain, "start getting these boys slung aloft smart!"

With a few brief directions to the youths he struck a light and began to feel round for the guard, who, with drunken cunning, was creeping out at the door in search of help.

Captain Mellor sprang for the man, whose howl was stopped by the captain's forceful way of snapping his jaws together. Then before he could recover breath a handful of dirty straw was forced into his mouth, and his elbows strapped behind him with his own belt. His trouser legs were skewered together with his own bayonet.

The insensible sergeant was strapped up much as was the drunken relief guard. The third man, Peldra, was beyond the need of such treatment.

Captain Mellor shut the door gently and locked it. Outside the window the chief was silently sending the lads up through the darkness, one after another.

"Thank God!" muttered the big captain. "Get aloft, now, and send the bowline down for me," he whispered to Mac.

The moment he reached the cliff top he took command.

"Unship the spar. Handy now. You lads, stand back there. Mr. Grey, and you, Alec, carry the spar. We'll leave nothing for a clew. I'll hump the rope. Mac, you take the block. Get on ahead, all of you."

Presently he had them all on the march, going silently through the dark that lay heavy upon everything. He took the rear. In front of him the Greek woman was carrying her son in her arms, easily and lightly crooning a murmur of patois over him as though he were a baby.

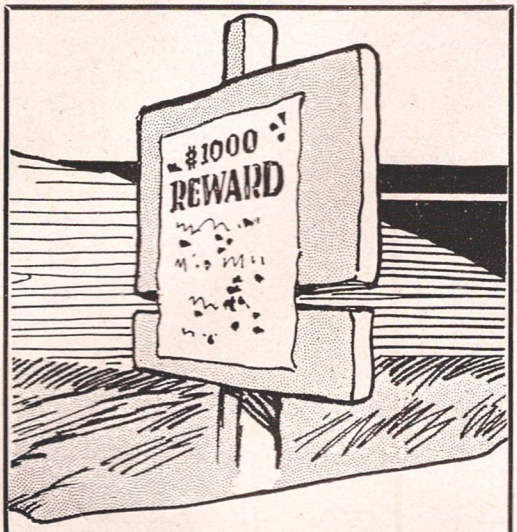
Two hours afterward, with his "merciful plunder" aboard, Captain Mellor was leaning over the after-rail of his bridge, staring at a far-off blur of lights on the horizon—the lights of the little town where, in the public square stood that brutally incongruous scaffold which would greet no youthful victims on the morrow!

Captain Mellor still trades along the Adriatic coast. And to this day, such is the irony of life's rewards, the little Frenchman never meets him without a resentful memory of his grimly brutal harshness of heart.

Often he refers to the miraculous escape of the doomed boys. And always the captain grunts unsympathetically. Then the little Frenchman mutters as he crosses himself devoutly:

"But the good God was kinder than you."

THE END



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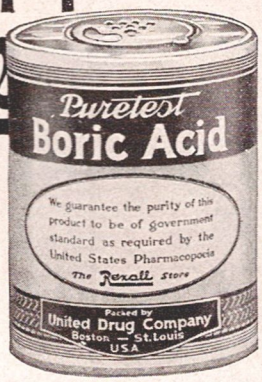
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